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Secrets of the Plains Indians**

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THE
DEAL**



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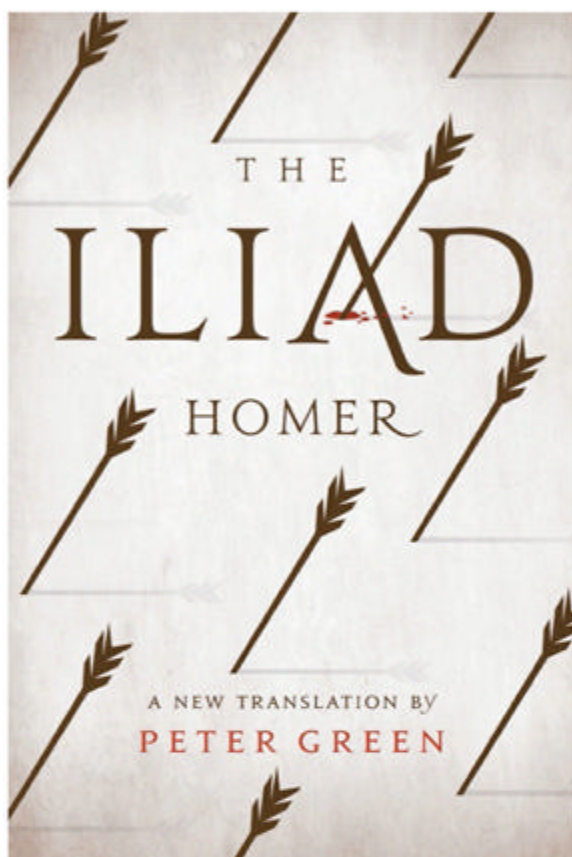
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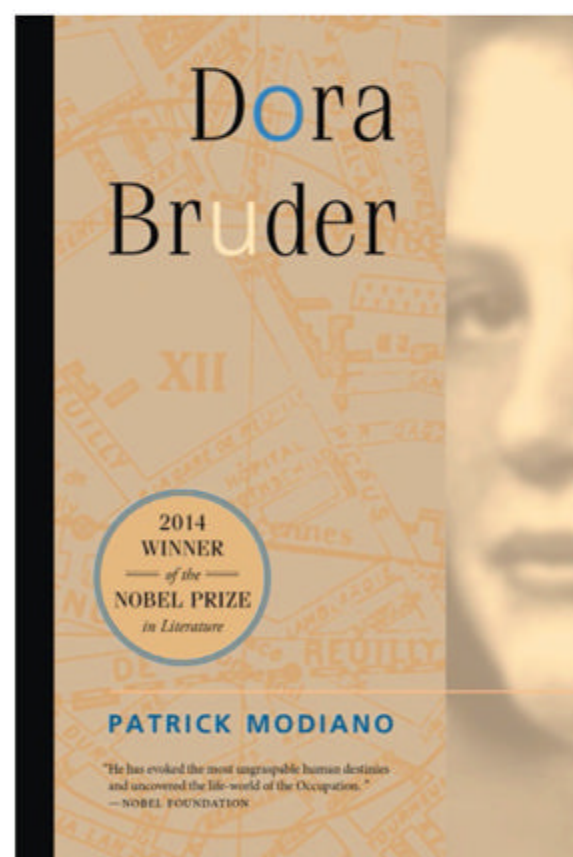
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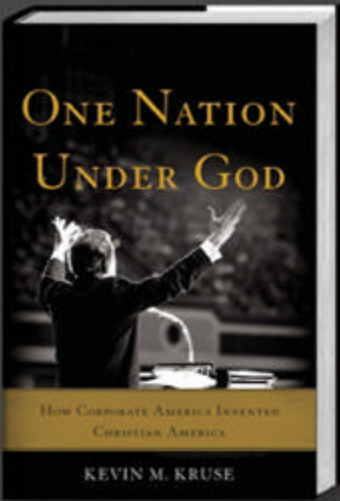
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The New Deal

Jessica T. Mathews

1.

During the months of negotiating a nuclear agreement with Iran, opponents of a deal have loudly anticipated failure, either because a deal wouldn't be reached, wouldn't be good enough, or wouldn't be upheld by Tehran. Charging that the impending deadline made the US too eager to reach a deal, House Speaker John Boehner unaccountably made the pressure worse by announcing that if a deal wasn't struck soon, Congress would immediately impose new sanctions on Iran—an act that would preemptively destroy any hope of a final agreement.

Republican presidential candidates one-upped each other in expressing disapproval of the negotiations. Scott Walker promised to revoke the deal on “day one” in the White House. Ted Cruz said that anyone who doesn't reject the deal “isn't fit to be president.” Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker promoted an early vote on a bill that ostensibly would give Congress a voice on the acceptability of the deal but was actually laced with poison pills that could destroy the negotiating process. So while most Americans hoped for an agreement, Congress geared up to restart a ferocious debate on a question of paramount national security about an agreement that did not yet exist.

The deal finally reached on April 2 was a surprise. While the announcement referred only to “parameters,” summarized in individual press releases by each participant country, taken together, the elements that were made public are stronger than outsiders (and, reportedly, some insiders) expected. Iran agrees to cut the number of its centrifuges from about 19,000 to 6,100 (5,060 in operation). Rather than export its 10,000-kilogram stockpile of enriched uranium, Iran agrees to shrink it to 300 kilograms. As was expected, no facilities are to be destroyed, but the underground enrichment facility at Fordow, of particular concern because it is impervious to most bombing, will be converted to a research center.* No enrichment will take place there for at least fifteen years. The plutonium-producing reactor at Arak will be permanently reconfigured, and Iran has committed “indefinitely” not to reprocess spent fuel, the process that separates out the pure plutonium needed for a bomb. Various commitments last from ten to as long as twenty-five years.

While many details are missing, inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) are to cover the entire supply chain of fissile material—from uranium mines to the mills where ore is processed, the facilities where it is chemically transformed before being enriched, and the manufacturing sites where centrifuge rotors are produced. A new mechanism will be created to track sensitive imports. The significance of such broad inspections

is that if fully implemented, they would make it extremely hard for Iran to operate a secret weapons program.

In return, sanctions imposed by the US and its partners will be “suspended” once the IAEA certifies that Iran has, in the words of the US summary, “taken all of its key nuclear-related steps.” Since that would require a very long time and the language is notably vague, one has to suspect that the timing of sanctions relief—a key sticking point throughout—is still in question. Other important issues, such as inspections of the facilities where weapons-related work may have taken place, are not covered or are described so vaguely that they remain unclear.

The use of parallel announcements by the negotiating countries without a jointly signed document invites later



US Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz, Secretary of State John Kerry, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, and Ali Akbar Salehi, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, Lausanne, Switzerland, March 2015

disagreements over what was actually decided. Even in the first few hours, disputes surfaced over whether Iran has or hasn't agreed to the IAEA's Additional Protocol, which provides, among other things, for delivery of more information to the IAEA and greater rights of access for its inspectors—an essential element of a verifiable agreement. One has to conclude that the negotiations still to come before the June 30 deadline will not just be about filling in the technical details and drafting airtight language—a huge task in itself—but in resolving several, and particularly divisive, issues that could not be agreed on at Lausanne. All that said, when we remember where this process began nearly two years ago and the years of failed attempts that preceded it, President Obama was within his rights in calling what has been achieved so far a “historic understanding.” In a long conversation with *The New York Times* three days later (April 5) elaborating on the pros and cons of a deal, he was again right in saying that even if Iran is “implacably” as bad as its greatest critics believe, this deal “would still be the best option” for US and Israeli security.

2.

The US and Iran must each now sell the deal back home, a more than usually difficult task since so much is still to be negotiated. In Tehran, at Friday prayers the day after the announcement, clerics who speak for the Supreme Leader voiced cautious support for the deal. One could wish the same for Washington. Here the loudest critics, who may talk about fewer centrifuges, or a longer period before Iran could “break out” and produce sufficient uranium for a

weapon, or their conviction that Iran will cheat, are actually hoping—though few will admit to it—for no deal.

Their reasons differ. Some want to inflict a crushing defeat on President Obama (include in this group the forty-seven senators who put a partisan victory over the nation's security and, one must add, their self-respect in signing the infamous letter of Senator Tom Cotton, which warned Iranian leaders that an agreement with President Obama was likely to be quickly rejected by members of Congress or the next president). Others harbor a real fear: that any deal would be a first step toward ending thirty-five years of frozen hostility between the US and Iran, perhaps fundamentally shifting the power balance in the Middle East. In this category we can put Prime Minis-

impose a cost on wrongdoing, but if the sanctioned country chooses to pay the price, sanctions cannot prevent it from continuing the sanctioned activities.

The second alternative is bombing Iran's nuclear facilities. Even supporters of this option do not believe that it would do more than delay Iran's progress by more than two to four years. It would certainly unite all Iranians around the absolute necessity of having a nuclear deterrent. It would strengthen Iran's hard-liners, radicalizing its politics and probably prolonging clerical rule. While the bombed facilities were being rebuilt, with more of them being put securely underground, there would be no inspectors or cameras. Outsiders would know far less than they do now about what is being built and where or how close Iran had come to producing a bomb. Soon another round of bombing would be necessary.

Is there a third alternative, namely a tougher deal that requires no enrichment in Iran and the destruction of its nuclear infrastructure? Prime Minister Netanyahu promised in his appearance before Congress that the US can get such a deal by “call[ing] their bluff.” Simply walk away from the table and “they'll be back, because they need the deal a lot more than you do.” If sanctions brought Iran to the table, this argument goes, more sanctions and more pressure will get us everything we want. It sounds reasonable, but it fails on closer inspection.

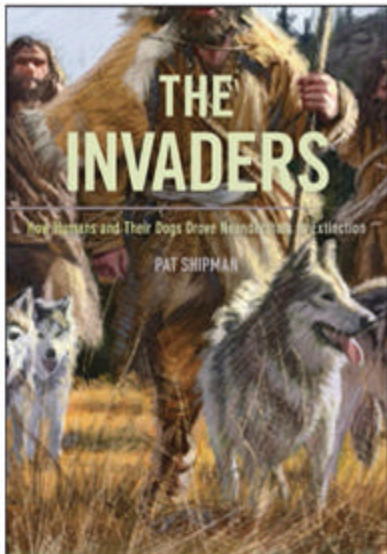
First, of course, the argument ignores the essence of negotiation—that neither side gets everything it wants. Also, although it is true that sanctions are imposing real pain on the Iranian economy, there are many in Iran's power elite, especially in the Revolutionary Guard, who profit from the country's isolation and would welcome continuing sanctions. Others oppose a deal for ideological reasons. The balance in Iranian politics that brought negotiators into serious talks for the first time was long in coming and remains precarious. If the US were to reverse course, abandoning negotiations in hopes of a winner-take-all outcome, Iran would follow suit.

Moreover, if other nations found America's reasons for rejecting a deal unreasonable, support for multilateral sanctions would quickly erode. Soon we would be back to ineffective, unilateral sanctions.

The question, then, is whether proponents of this approach have diagnosed fundamental weaknesses in the deal that has been reached and genuinely believe that renewed negotiation could strengthen it, or whether they are counting on both sides walking away from the table and not returning. The fact that so many of them—emphatically including Netanyahu—trashed the deal before it existed and make demands they know to be nonnegotiable strongly suggests that the insistence that the US “negotiate a better deal” is phony. Its advocates should be pushed to describe exactly what they think could be extracted from Iran. The answers should be measured against reality, keeping in mind that Iran does not come to the table as a nation that has been defeated on the battlefield but as a country with enormous natural resources that has, over many years, reached near-nuclear status.

The argument for adding nonnuclear issues to the negotiations at this

*For more on both the activities that will be forbidden at Fordow and the scientific research that might take place there, see Jeremy Bernstein, “A New Future for Iranian Physics?,” *NYRblog*, April 3, 2015.



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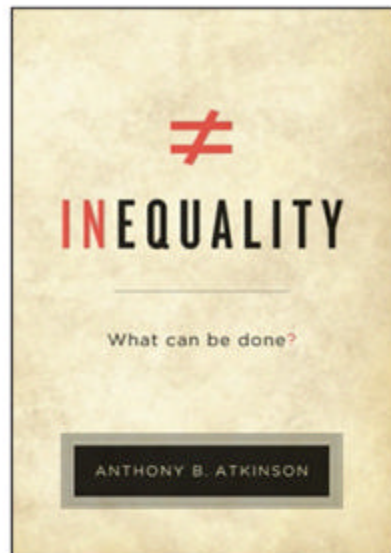
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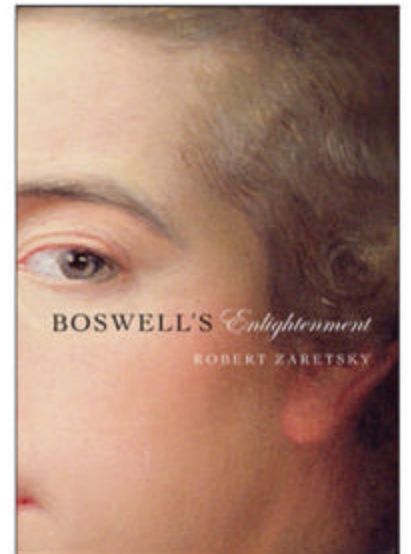
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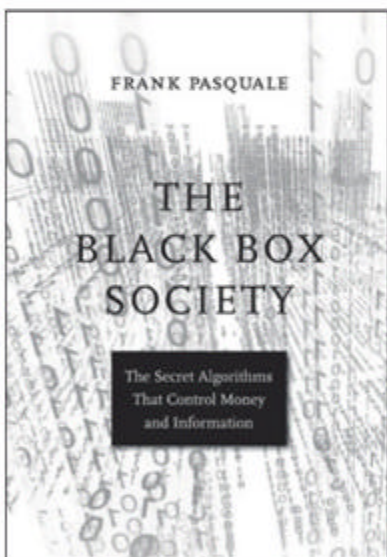
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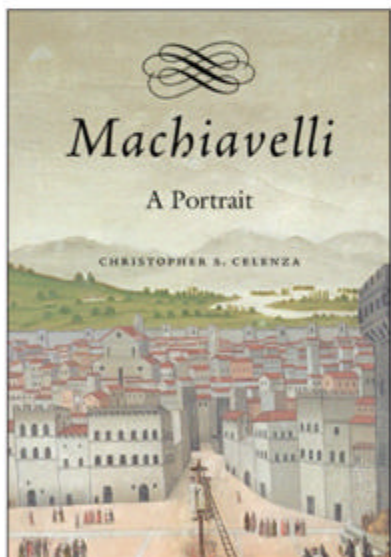
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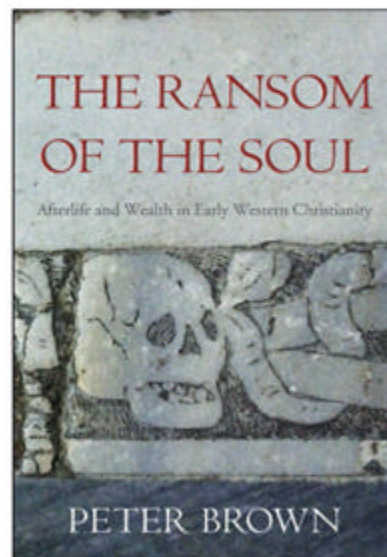
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point—such as demanding that Iran must first agree to end support for terrorism—is equally untenable. The decision to limit the negotiations to Iran’s nuclear program was made, more than two years ago, for good reason. The number of grievances each side had against the other, and the decades-deep reservoir of distrust between them, meant that an all-encompassing agenda would reduce the already slim chances of success to near zero. Adding in the differing views of the P5+1 partners (China, France, Russia, the UK, the US, and Germany) only reinforces the conclusion. The goal posts cannot reasonably be moved now to include other aspects of Iranian policy, no matter how objectionable.

3.

It is too soon to comment in detail about the elements of the agreement, especially about its all-important inspections, monitoring, and verification provisions, but two particularly vexing issues deserve attention.

Breakout time is often considered the measure of an acceptable agreement. It is not, as so often portrayed, the time required to build a bomb. It is defined only as the time needed to accumulate enough highly enriched uranium for a single nuclear weapon, and it is an estimate, based on a number of assumptions. This accounts, in part, for differences in the numbers being quarreled about. The difference between the two to three months that Iran would need today and the twelve months that Iran would need under the

agreement is highly significant. The difference between ten months and twelve months is meaningless.

More to the point is what comes next. After accumulating the fuel, a country has to make the actual weapon and then, presumably, test it. That, of course, means enough fuel for two weapons, not one. But the military value of a single nuclear weapon is close to zero. Indeed, if that weapon provokes a weaker adversary—Saudi Arabia, in Iran’s case—to acquire nuclear weapons of its own, the net result is not an asset but a tremendous liability.

For Iran to acquire a nuclear arsenal useful against Israel would require an enormous, highly visible, and easily detected effort over years. The only exception would be a choice to commit national suicide, for which a single bomb would suffice.

Breakout time is, in short, a useful measure but far from being the single important one. With appropriate restrictions on the production of plutonium and highly enriched uranium and tight inspections and monitoring, far less than twelve months would actually be needed to detect and respond to an attempt by Iran to race for a weapon.

The second issue is the matter of when and to what degree Iran will reveal what it actually did in the past in pursuing a nuclear weapon. The IAEA has had a long list of questions about these activities that Iran has refused to answer for years. The US summary of the agreement says only that Iran “will implement an agreed set of measures” to address these concerns about past actions, suggesting that this issue, too, has not yet been agreed on.

Legitimate and highly emotional questions will be raised on this matter. My guess is that it will prove to be a continuing stumbling block for negotiations. To clear up the questions, Iran would have to admit to violating its commitments under the Non-Proliferation Treaty it signed in 1970. Nations—all nations—hate to admit such error. Iran’s case will be even more difficult because of the fatwa issued by the Supreme Leader declaring nuclear weapons to be a violation of the principles of the Islamic Republic.

It may be necessary to work around the issue in some way, perhaps postponing the resolution for some years until public attention ebbs. Demands that Iran “come clean” are natural, but learning exactly what Iran did will have only modest technical value. Some calling for this information simply want to embarrass Tehran, or to pose a condition that will block an agreement. In the end, we may need to decide whether we care more about the future or the past. If so, this should be an easy call.

4.

The most significant objection, not to this agreement but to any agreement, is the one that primarily fuels Israel’s efforts to prevent a deal. It is the fear that an agreement will lead to Iran rejoining the international community, to warming relations between Tehran and Washington, and to a change in the familiar alignment of nations in the Middle East. These are valid fears.

For most countries in the world, resolving the nuclear issue will mean that normal relations with Iran will soon follow. This was inevitable: Iran would not stay a pariah nation forever. And while more normal relations with the international community may or may not lead to less aggressive policies and less support for terrorism on Tehran’s part, continued outsider status is unlikely to change its behavior. With sanctions lifted, Iran will have much more money to spend—some of it for destructive purposes. That, too, is a price of an agreement.

On the other hand, the concern that the United States will return to the days of the Shah, closely aligning itself with Iran, is overblown. As the prospect of an agreement has neared, opponents have pushed this fear so far to the fore that they argue that the change they dread has already occurred. According to the Republican commentator Michael Gerson, “evidence for an evolving administration attitude toward Iran has been on display” in both Syria and Iraq. Republicans “sense a major shift in American policy—a desire to cozy up with Iran.” But the temporary convergence of American and Iranian interests in defeating ISIS in Iraq would exist whether nuclear talks were underway or not. Similarly, Washington’s prolonged indecision and its refusal to intervene militarily in Syria’s four-year-old conflict without a political solution in sight long predates the opening with Iran. The same is true for the burgeoning war in Yemen, where Washington chooses not to intervene militarily for compelling local reasons, not because Iran is backing the Houthis rebels.

It is impossible to predict whether a nuclear agreement will lead to better relations between the US and Iran in the near term. Hard-liners in both countries may respond by ratcheting up tensions on many other issues. Eventually, though,

removing the absolute block to normal relations caused by Iran’s nuclear program would open the possibility of beginning to address the many other issues that divide Washington and Tehran. If that happens, it can only be to the good, but there is no reason to believe that the US will carelessly abandon its manifold objections to Iranian policies.

Nervousness on the part of the Sunni nations, particularly the Gulf States, is inevitable. Some of them can hardly decide whether they fear a nuclear deal more or less than a nuclear Iran. So far, the administration has shown care in addressing their concerns. The timing of the announcement that the US would resume arms sales to Egypt was not unrelated to the nuclear talks. And in announcing the deal, the president also announced an invitation to Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States to meet at Camp David to discuss strengthening security cooperation.

5.

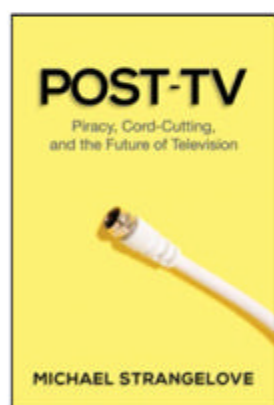
The weeks ahead are of enormous consequence to US national security, not only with respect to Iran, but to our long-term ability to frame and execute a coherent foreign policy not determined solely by partisan motives. If Congress takes steps to reject the nuclear deal before it is completed, or if it undermines US negotiators by raising further doubts in Tehran that Washington will ever meet its commitments to lift sanctions, it will have done significant long-term damage to US power in ways that no amount of military strength can offset. The US ability to lead, to shape international relations, and to influence other countries’ decisions depends on its stature. A country that follows one policy through several presidencies with bipartisan support and then suddenly reverses course midstream will be diminished. A country that cannot speak abroad with a single voice will not command the respect the US expects and needs.

If a final deal can ultimately be negotiated, Congress will have a major part to play when it must decide whether Iran’s behavior merits lifting legislative sanctions. Long before that, Congress should have a full opportunity to assess the agreement, which can only be done after negotiations are completed. Chairman Corker should underline the leadership position he took in not signing the Cotton letter by postponing a vote on this bill until early July and adjusting its language accordingly. Later, Congress’s oversight of the deal’s implementation should be robust. Optimally, a special body can be created to receive frequent, highly classified briefings and to travel to Iran to judge for itself whether the agreement’s terms are being fully met.

Those who worry that a deal with Iran will entail some risk should remember that preventing nuclear proliferation almost never happens in a single leap. Countries change direction slowly. International rules and norms are built up brick by brick over years. Technical capacities to monitor and political expectations are gradually but steadily strengthened. The agreement with Iran, if one is finally reached, will not be the end, but a beginning. It must be strong and carefully framed and minutely monitored, but it need not be watertight in order for it to ultimately open the way to a permanently nonnuclear Iran. □

—April 6, 2015

New from University of Toronto Press

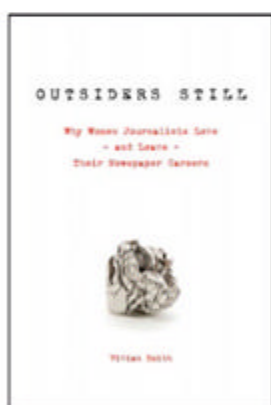


Post-TV

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by Michael Strangelove

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Outsiders Still

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by Vivian Smith

Why do so many female journalists leave the industry and so few reach the top? Vivian Smith reveals how overt hostility to women in the newsroom has been replaced by systemic inequality that limits or ends the careers of many female journalists.



Love's Refraction

Jealousy and Compersion in Queer Women's Polyamorous Relationships

by Jillian Deri

In *Love's Refraction*, Jillian Deri explores how and why polyamorists manage jealousy and shows how polyamory challenges traditional emotional and sexual norms.



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Margaret Gave Me a Rainbow: 2:30pm 21 November, 1971
 3M Color-in-Color mylar from inside the copier, heat transferred
 (with hand iron) to manilla paper hand stitched to cloth. Torn silver print
 of my ear machine-sewn to cloth. Tassels machine-sewn to a segment
 of the green Army sheet taken from my bed, as I had no cloth that color
 on hand, machine-sewn onto yellow cotton yardage.

Keith A. Smith

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A Tale of Woe and Glory

Thomas Powers

The Plains Indians:

Artists of Earth and Sky

an exhibition at the Musée du quai Branly, Paris, April 8–July 20, 2014; the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, September 19, 2014–January 11, 2015; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, March 9–May 10, 2015.

Catalog of the exhibition edited by Gaylord Torrence. Skira Rizzoli/Musée du quai Branly, 317 pp., \$65.00

A kind of twilight invites silence in a show of Plains Indian art and material culture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art that records their long moment of glory before the United States Army whipped them, as whites liked to say at the time, and confined them to reservations in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The twilight is easily explained. Much of the art in the show is painted on tanned hides using natural dyes subject to fading in strong light—blanket-like robes, men's shirts worn as a badge of office or status, shields and shield covers, the rawhide cases called *parfleches* that women painted with geometric designs. But the twilight also seems right for what remains of a culture so utterly confounded by the invasion of richer, better-armed people with robust immune systems and an obsession with building fences.

What remains includes many very early items from European collections, especially the Musée du quai Branly in Paris, an organizer of the show along with the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City. Painted robes and feathered headdresses collected by European explorers, traders, and missionaries beginning around 1700 reflect the world before the arrival of the horse on the Plains. Just when that happened is still hotly argued by scholars. The Sicangu Lakota chief Spotted Tail (circa 1823–1881) told an army officer that when his father was a boy the Sicangu still traveled from place to place with only dogs to pull their belongings.

Scholars say the first horses arrived on the Plains a good deal earlier than that, perhaps as early as the middle of the seventeenth century, but the important fact is what followed—a dramatic expansion of the Indians' ability to kill buffalo. Their meat fed an exploding Indian population, and tanned buffalo robes, sold to white traders, financed the purchase of guns, powder and ball, glass beads, new dyes, trade cloth, iron pots and steel knives, and a wide range of other items of Euro-American manufacture.

The breadth and suddenness of the change would be hard to exaggerate. In the winter of 1787–1788 an old Cree Indian named Saukamappee told a young fur trader of a big fight with another tribe in which he took part as a youth in about 1720. His band had few guns and less ammunition; most of the men, including Saukamappee's father, were armed with bows, and of the fifty arrows in his father's quiver only ten had iron points. "The others were headed with stone."

With this detail we can date almost the minute of the Crees' introduction



Mató Topé: Battle with a Cheyenne Chief, 1833

to the modern world. Within a few years at most all the arrows in every quiver on the plains would have iron points. Saukamappee's tale is included in *Our Hearts Fell to the Ground*,¹ a collection of Plains Indian testimony and reminiscence collected by Colin Calloway, a Dartmouth professor who has also written an impressively lively and comprehensive essay in the catalog of the Met show, *The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky*.

The horse is the first great fact in the lives of the Plains Indians during their glory years, Calloway tells us; the next is disease, especially smallpox, pneumonia, cholera, and measles, which decimated the Plains tribes in a wave of epidemics beginning pretty much at the moment Spanish explorers arrived looking for rumored cities of gold. Some tribes were lucky, some not. The population of the Caddo, who lived in Texas and along the lower Mississippi River, was cut down in successive epidemics from perhaps 200,000 to as few as 10,000. Half the Pawnees died in the early 1830s. The Blackfeet, once lords of the northern Plains, were reduced by two thirds in the great smallpox epidemic of 1837, brought up the Missouri River by traders.

But none suffered a loss more catastrophic than the Mandan. Once a great tribe, they were reduced by smallpox in the 1780s. When Lewis and Clark ar-

rived in 1804 to spend the winter, the Mandan were living in two remaining villages, Matootonha and Roptahee, home to about two thousand people. Later the Mandan were hosts to the traveling painter George Catlin in 1832 and the Swiss artist Karl Bodmer a year later. Both painted the portrait of Mató Tópe—Four Bears—a leading man in the Mandan villages and an artist much influenced, it has been argued, by watching Catlin and Bodmer at work. The smallpox epidemic of 1837 pretty well "rubbed them out," a phrase that entered English from Plains Indian sign language. In July of that year Mató Tópe died of smallpox on the very day he delivered a bitter deathbed speech to his people:

My friends one and all, Listen to what I have to say—Ever since I can remember, I have loved the Whites.... But to day, I do Pronounce them to be a set of Black harted dogs, they have deceived Me, them that I always considered as Brothers.... I do not fear *Death* my friends. You Know it, but to *die* with my face rotten, that even the Wolves will shrink with horror at seeing me, and say to themselves, that is the 4 Bears the Friend of the Whites....

When the smallpox ran its course that fall the Mandan had been reduced to 138 survivors.

In his prime Mató Tópe painted many leather robes with images from his life as a warrior. One of them was collected by a Swiss trader on the Upper

Missouri in the year the artist died; it is on loan to the Met exhibition from its current home in the Bern Historical Museum in Switzerland. Depicted are a series of war exploits including a hand-to-hand fight between Mató Tópe and a Cheyenne wielding a knife that the Mandan has grabbed by the blade, cutting himself severely—a copious spray of blood falls from the wound.

That Mató Tópe turned the tables and killed the Cheyenne is impressive, but the really startling thing is the way he has drawn the two figures—a radical change in style from another robe in the show, now in Harvard's Peabody Museum, by an artist near the Missouri River. Dating of the Peabody robe is difficult. It was long believed to have been collected by Lewis and Clark but doubts have crept in; it might have been painted as early as 1780, in the opinion of Castle McLaughlin, a curator at the Peabody who published a book about artifacts collected (maybe) by Lewis and Clark, *Arts of Diplomacy*,² and who has written several entries in the Met exhibition's catalog. But the date could be as late as 1825.

No matter. The point is the style. Like Mató Tópe's robe, the Peabody robe records incidents of battle but the figures are presented very simply and convey less information. They are not primitive, just different. They have round heads without facial features. Their arms and legs are tapering sticks. Their torsos are all represented by boxes in trapezoidal shape, wide at the shoulder, narrower at the waist. There are a number of robes decorated with trapezoid men in the Met exhibition, all early, all executed before the arrival on the Upper Missouri of Catlin and Bodmer, who clearly dazzled Mató Tópe and his friends. The new drawing style spread quickly and eventually generated a large body of work by Plains artists, generally called ledger drawings because so much of it was drawn on paper torn from ledger books found at military and trading posts. Several outstanding examples of this later work are included in the show, including drawings by the Southern Cheyenne Howling Wolf, the Kiowa Wohaw, the Teton Sioux Black Hawk, and others whose names are not known.

But the most dazzling of the new-style drawings, in my view, is a large (twenty-four by sixty-six inches) drawing of a sun dance by an unnamed artist created near the end of the nineteenth century, when the sun dance, like many other rituals and ceremonies, had been forbidden by the authorities. An authoritative account of the Lakota sun dance was published by James R. Walker in 1917; the sun dance drawing in the Met exhibition conveys a rich feel for the place of the ceremony in tribal life and confirms many details of Walker's observations. Dangling from the top of the sun dance pole in the center of the drawing, for example, are two small rawhide cutouts of a man and a buffalo,

²*Arts of Diplomacy: Lewis and Clark's Indian Collection* (University of Washington Press, 2003).

I have no memories of Diane Arbus. *Not even of a phone call, let alone a face-to-face meeting. I was eight years old when she killed herself. They tell me I was playing baseball in the backyard in St. Louis when the phone rang, but I do not remember even that.*

Maybe that was because she was a secret in our house. Her brother, Howard Nemerov, my father, did not say much about her that I recall. They were close, yes, especially when they were children, but she was out of his mind, so far as I could tell, in those years when I grew up.

A sign of this was the fate of a photograph she gave him—a print of her most famous one, Identical twins, Roselle, N.J. 1966, made out to him along the white edge at the bottom: “for h.” “Diane Arbus.” It was a photograph he never matted, never framed, and never even displayed. Instead, it was kept in a drawer in the living room of our house, mingled among my childhood drawing supplies, the sheets of paper and colored pens. Predictably in that place the photograph suffered damage, creases and some cracks in the emulsion. Meanwhile, across the room, my father hung a large ponderous landscape painting by his father, David Nemerov, a person I don’t think he liked very much, on the wall above the couch. Countryside Serenity was the title, inscribed on a golden plaque on the gold-and-white frame. . . .

ALEXANDER NEMEROV

from *Silent Dialogues: Diane Arbus & Howard Nemerov*

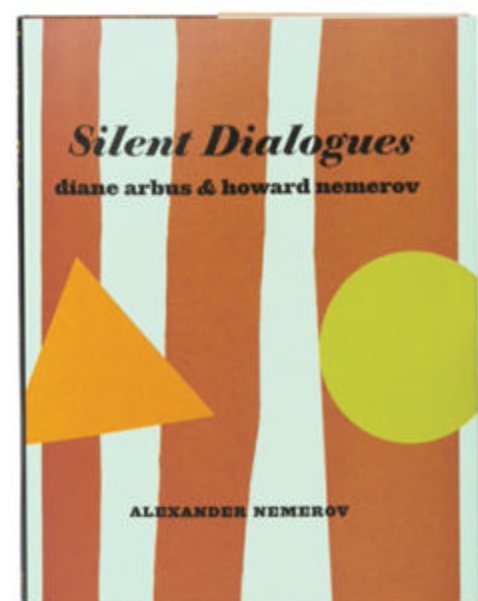
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hard to identify unless you know what they are.

Most Plains Indian drawing, whether on robes, shirts, or paper, was a bold artistic assertion of the self. To draw, sing, act out, or simply tell of personal experience, almost all of it triumphal, was a vital expression of male ego on the Plains—like Mató Tópe's visual account of his fight with the Cheyenne, a signal achievement he also recorded with a twelve-by-fifteen-inch watercolor on paper now in Omaha's Joslyn Art Museum, which is reproduced in the Met exhibition's catalog. The watercolor is almost obsessive in its attention to detail. Mató Tópe's upper body is painted red, his moccasins have yellow stripes, his leggings are decorated with multicolored fringe, and drawn superimposed across his waist is a pipe, sign that he was leader of a war party. No Mandan of the time, or scholar of today, could fail to know who this is—Mató Tópe!

The Cheyenne is also meticulously portrayed. He has painted himself green, he is wearing an otterskin bonnet, a powder horn hangs from his shoulder, and his leggings are elaborately painted and decorated with beads or porcupine quills. Mató Tópe wants to be sure we know he killed a formidable Cheyenne warrior in his prime. Both figures are drawn in the round in the Catlin-Bodmer style, which soon banished the trapezoid men entirely from Plains art.

By the time the sun dance artist went to work fifty or sixty years after the death of Mató Tópe, immense changes were apparent in the conventions of drawing and painting by Plains Indians. Personal exploits were still the main subject matter but some artists, like the sun dance master, had a broader subject in mind, not too different from that of Italian painters of religious scenes during the Renaissance, which might be defined as the depiction of social life sustained by a sacred sacrifice of blood.

The midsummer sun dance ceremony is as bloody as a crucifixion, and makes a similar promise. In the drawing the men who have painted themselves yellow, as Janet Berlo writes in the catalog, "have elected to perform the most sacred and painful act of piercing their pectoral muscles and attaching themselves to the central pole, finally ripping their bodies away in an act of blood sacrifice that aligns them with the potent powers of the sun." The men who "sacrificed their flesh" before the ban in the 1880s, and have resumed doing so in recent decades, were carrying out personal vows, begging pity from the Wakan Tanka (Lakota for Great Spirit) or expressing thanks by the shedding of blood for some gift like the recovery from illness of a loved one.

While the dancers each had his own reason for dancing, the annual ceremony was also considered vital to the welfare of the whole people. There is no way of knowing if the sun dance artist included himself among the dancers he depicted; if so, he has done it quietly, while his painting celebrates the entire social experience, not just the dancers but all those watching, women wrapped in robes and carrying umbrellas, children, drummers, and singers, everybody dressed in their best, the community at large that is thus sustained for another year. The assertion

has shifted from me, Mató Tópe! to us, the People!

Everything in the Met exhibition could be described at similar length, and most of the objects are in the show's catalog. But the show tells us something the catalog does not, or at least not as clearly. It is implicit in the arrangement or layout of the displays, which begin with two sculptures, both pipes for smoking, both in the form of a human figure. The older of the two, dated to roughly the beginning of the Christian Era, was found in the Adena Mound near Chillicothe, Ohio. It is carved from Catlinite or pipestone, which is still quarried in Minnesota for the making of traditional T-shaped "peace" pipes. The younger of the two was found in the 1930s by amateurs excavating the Spiro mound in Oklahoma. It is carved from bauxite and is dated to about the year 1100, a few hundred years before the arrival of Columbus in the New World, an event that was promptly followed by numerous Spaniards carrying viruses to which Native Americans had no resistance.

Some scholars believe that the new diseases may have killed as much as 90 percent of an Indian population estimated to be as large as 50 million, roughly the size of Europe's in 1492. What happened to the makers of these two human-figure pipes is impossible to say, but one thing seems clear—they along with their culture and art disappeared utterly from what became the United States. Their fate was the one all cultures seem to fear and dread—a rubbing out to the very last person. The message of those pipes, a whisper of ultimate twilight, is what opens the Met show.

At the other end of the exhibition, around the corner in a hall more brightly lit, is a sampling of some really fine modern things—beaded dance outfits like one worn by the Hunkpapa Lakota Jodi Gillette, a traditional dancer; old crafts put to new uses like a beaded suitcase made by Nellie Two Bear Gates for the 1909 graduation of her daughter from the Carlisle Indian School; paintings that dramatically merge old and new styles; a war shirt made of photographs created by the Northern Cheyenne Bently Spang; a Kiowa fan from the 1940s made of eagle feathers, something now permitted only to Native Americans for sacred purposes; a Sicangu star quilt in a style the Lakota have taken for their own.

All are beautiful and bold and represent a clear statement of a perennial Native American protest that might be dated to 1908 or 1910 when the photographer Edward S. Curtis published a photograph of Navajo on horseback disappearing into the desert dusk that he titled *The Vanishing Race*. At every opportunity since, Indians have proclaimed, "We are still here!" The Met exhibition is arranged to end on a note clearly affirming that.

But this vigorous modern work cannot alter certain facts, there for anyone who cares to see. A map on the wall at the opening of the show identifies about thirty separate tribes from six different language families that peopled the Plains when the very first traders arrived to buy furs on the Upper Missouri. Three of those languages are extinct—Tonkawa, Quapaw, and Kitsai. A dozen others are spoken only

by a relative handful of elderly people, from roughly two hundred in the case of the Assiniboine-Stoney, down to ten or twenty in the case of the Gros Ventre, Hidatsa, and Osage. Even the Cree speakers in Canada number only 70,000.

What happened to the Plains languages happened in the same way over the same period to the animal and plant life of the Plains encountered by Lewis and Clark, most conspicuously and dramatically to the buffalo, reduced from perhaps 30 million in the early 1800s to fewer than a thousand in 1900. In recent months climatologists have darkened the picture still further with predictions of a coming period of megadroughts threatening hard times



'Ghost Dance Dress'; Southern Arapaho artist, Oklahoma, circa 1890

for everything that walks, creeps, or draws moisture up through root filaments on the Great Plains.

Something of that judgment is captured in a 2001 collage created by the Oglala Lakota artist Arthur Amiotte, which strikes a note about as far from celebration as it is possible to get. The work may be modern but the feeling has been fermenting for a century or more. Amiotte is a great-grandson of Henry Standing Bear, who survived the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876 when he was a young man of sixteen or seventeen; he was lucky to be touring in Europe with Buffalo Bill at the time of the massacre of more than two hundred Lakota at Wounded Knee in 1890, when he had just turned thirty.

Even to whisper the words "Wounded Knee" invites this dark event to take over, but the Met exhibition does not shrink back, beginning with Amiotte's collage. His work is framed with press clippings of the Little Bighorn fight, photos of the dead at Wounded Knee and the nearby church where many of the wounded spent their last hours. In the center are portraits of Kicking Bear, the Brule Arnold Short Bull, the Paiute ghost dance messiah Wovoka, also known as Jack Wilson, and Sitting Bull, the Hunkpapa chief whose killing led to the massacre. Those who want to know more about this painful event should read Jerome Greene's recent and authoritative account, *American Carnage*.³

³*American Carnage: Wounded Knee, 1890* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2014).

Also included in the exhibition is a remarkable ink drawing on muslin of the last moments of Sitting Bull, when about forty Indian police from the Standing Rock Agency in North Dakota approached the chief's cabin to place him under arrest. The drawing was made in about 1920 by one of the Indian police who had been there, Thomas Stone Man, who left little additional impression on history. This drawing is richly detailed with the names of the dead, both Indian police and supporters of Sitting Bull, and a kind of chronology of the unfolding of events. No deposition in court could have conveyed what Thomas Stone Man saw more meticulously.

But it is the stunning item at the very center of the show that serves to capture what the curators want to say about the Plains Indians during their glory years ending in social trauma. Displayed by itself between two curving walls in a kind of mini-chapel is a striking woman's dress identified as a Southern Arapaho ghost dance dress of 1890. The dress, which belongs to the California investment manager and art collector Kenneth Siebel, is similar to others found in the collections of the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming. In the notes on the Siebel dress written for the catalog by Emma Hansen, a senior curator of the Buffalo Bill Center, we are told nothing about the history of the dress and it is my guess that Siebel and Hansen alike have very little idea of where it has been for the last 120 years.

The dress is made of hide colored brick red with rubbed-in pigment. The sleeve ends, side seams, and skirt are decorated with abundant fine green fringes. A bottom border is blue with many four-pointed stars. The body of the dress is decorated with drawings front and back including a left hand in yellow, a turtle, thunderbirds, a magpie, a buffalo, a large four-pointed star, and other symbols and images with powerful traditional meanings. Was this dress ever worn by a ghost dancer? Without a solid provenance it is impossible to say, but the images on the dress are eloquent evidence of the whole-souled yearning that was expressed in the ghost dance movement of 1890.

It was Wovoka, a Northern Paiute living in Nevada, who had the vision that inspired the dancers. They believed that dancing in a new sacred way, singing special songs while wearing special shirts and dresses, would restore their old life on the Plains, bringing back the buffalo that had disappeared so completely it was widely believed they had gone back into the earth, and restoring to life all the people who had died in war and massacre.

The dancing spread across the Plains, north and south, and whites grew frightened, with predictable result. The Southern Arapaho ghost dance dress expresses the impossible dream of a people who have lost everything but memory. The Arthur Amiotte collage tells us how the dream died, leaving a couple of hundred bodies frozen in the snow along Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota. So for all its beauty the Met exhibition is a tale of glory and woe ending not with a song but a wail, something like the cry of Mató Tópe on his deathbed, ruing the day he saw the whites coming up the Missouri River. □

Growing Up Too Black

Francine Prose

God Help the Child

by Toni Morrison.
Knopf, 178 pp., \$24.95

The title of Toni Morrison's new novel echoes that of the sly, langorous Billie Holiday ballad "God Bless the Child." But while the child in the song is blessed, or deserves to be blessed, because he's "got his own"—something, presumably money, that will enable him to thrive regardless of what "Mama may have"—the children in *God Help the Child* have nothing: no power, no agency, no protection from the unfeeling or predatory adults around them.

The novel begins with a woman who calls herself Sweetness absolving herself for having had a daughter whose skin is much darker than her own, and explaining why she has mistreated little Lula Ann:

It's not my fault. So you can't blame me. I didn't do it and have no idea how it happened. It didn't take more than an hour after they pulled her out from between my legs to realize something was wrong. Really wrong. She was so black she scared me. Midnight black.... Some of you probably think it's a bad thing to group ourselves according to skin color—the lighter, the better—in social clubs, neighborhoods, churches, sororities, even colored schools. But how else can we hold on to a little dignity?... I hate to say it, but from the very beginning in the maternity ward the baby, Lula Ann, embarrassed me.

Such passages remind us that Morrison, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1993, has consistently proved herself to be an intrepid writer, boldly reporting on the ongoing war between kindness and cruelty, acknowledging how often children are the collateral damage in those battles and, in this opening salvo, taking on the delicate subject of color prejudice within the African-American community. Though race and class are important elements in the novel, it gradually becomes clear that any child, regardless of skin color or social status, can fall prey to the horrors that adults visit upon the young.

Sweetness is hardly the worst mother in the book, and unlike the more luckless children whose stories Morrison tells here, Lula Ann overcomes (or appears to have overcome) the damage inflicted by a woman who has chosen a new name just to distance herself from her daughter. "I told her to call me 'Sweetness' instead of 'Mother' or 'Mama.' It was safer. Being that black and having what I think are too-thick lips calling me 'Mama' would confuse people."

Lula Ann Bridewell grows up to be a beautiful woman who also rechristens herself, dropping "that dumb, country-fied name as soon as I left high school. I was Ann Bride for two years until I interviewed for a job at Sylvia, Inc., and, on a hunch, shortened my name to Bride, with nothing anyone needs to say before or after that one memorable syllable." Bride carefully selects her



Toni Morrison, Princeton, New Jersey, 1992

wardrobe and so effectively deploys her intelligence, ambition, and good looks that, while still in her twenties, she "runs a major department in a billion-dollar company":

I named it YOU, GIRL: Cosmetics for Your Personal Millennium. It's for girls and women of all complexions from ebony to lemonade to milk. And it's mine, all mine—the idea, the brand, the campaign.

All of this may strike us as quite unlike Morrison's previous novels, most of which have been set in the past. *Be-loved* took place around the time of the Civil War, *A Mercy* in the late seventeenth century; *Home* was set in the aftermath of the Korean War. But *God Help the Child* offers a take on contemporary manners that at first seems closer to satire than anything Morrison has done so far.

Bride drives a "sleek, rat gray" Jaguar with a vanity license, drinks Smartwater, wears an "oyster-white cashmere dress and boots of brushed rabbit fur the color of the moon," and measures her sexual relationships against "those double-page spreads in fashion magazines, you know, couples standing half-naked in surf, looking so fierce and downright mean, their sexuality like lightning and the sky going dark to show off the shine of their skin."

There's a complex irony in the idea of a woman who has been made miserable because of her color growing up to become a purveyor of luxury skin-care products. And we may wonder if Morrison is planning to look more critically at our culture's attempts to convince women that buying the perfect moisturizer is the key to happiness and fulfillment. But Bride, haunted by crimes and betrayals far worse than this relatively benign form of consumer fraud, isn't particularly

troubled by the political implications of her profession:

In addition to breasts, every woman...wanted longer, thicker eyelashes. A woman could be cobra-thin and starving, but if she had grapefruit boobs and raccoon eyes, she could be deliriously happy. Right. She would get right on it after this trip.

It might have been interesting to see Bride at a sales meeting or in the boardroom, but this is not that kind of book. Morrison is more engaged by beauty in the abstract, and by larger concerns—surface vs. substance, the extent to which childhood, appearance, and prejudice mold and deform us—than by the details of what a woman does at a lucrative and glamorous job.

At various points the novel shifts from the familiar and the real to the allegorical and the mythic, and then shifts back again. The challenge that Morrison has set for herself is to have it both ways, more or less at once: to populate a fairy tale with credible human beings and to set it in a world in which the paranormal coexists with the same electronic gadgets and brand names we recognize from our own.

The change of setting from past to present is reflected in the novel's prose. The lyricism of *Home* ("Maniac moonlight doing the work of absent stars matched his desperate frenzy") and the intentional obscurities of *Paradise* have mostly given way to more colloquial vocabulary and syntax. The sentences are shorter, less ornately decorated with metaphor and simile, and this uninflected sparseness—the voice seems to fit a range of characters—serves Morrison well as the narrative's point of view moves deftly among them.

God Help the Child reminds us of how enjoyable it can be when a writer uses multiple perspectives—a technique by which Morrison insists on considering variant aspects of a situation and on facing the contradictions that arise from her characters' often mercurial and tormented psyches. As she so frequently has in the past, she combines tough-mindedness with forgiveness as she propels Bride through tragedy toward greater self-knowledge and a conclusion brightened by penitence and hope. Even Sweetness is allowed to express her humanity and remorse:

If I sound irritable, ungrateful, part of it is because underneath is regret. All the little things I didn't do or did wrong.... Taught me a lesson I should have known all along. What you do to children matters. And they might never forget.

God Help the Child succeeds in embracing the philosophical, the political, and the metaphysical without sacrificing momentum. The brief novel is densely plotted, and—curious about the secrets that these men and women hesitate or refuse to disclose—we read on to find out what happens and how these hidden traumas will come to light.

The plot includes a series of revelations and surprises, nearly all of which involve a case or an allegation of child abuse. As a girl, Bride was the star witness at a trial that resulted in a teacher named Sofia Huxley being sentenced to twenty-five years to life in prison for molesting her students. Years later, after Bride's lover Booker deserts her, she takes to the road to track him down, and finds refuge with a kindly couple of hippie survivalists who have rescued a little girl called Rain from a life of hellish exploitation on the streets. Bride's best friend Brooklyn has chosen to tell no one about the childhood suffering that has left her with a quasi-clairvoyant intuition for "what people want and how to please them."

The account of Booker's early home life—initially much happier and more secure than the gothic childhoods of the novel's girls and women—is one of the loveliest and most relaxed sections in the book:

Every Saturday morning, first thing before breakfast, his parents held conferences with their children requiring them to answer two questions put to each of them: 1. What have you learned that is true (and how do you know)? 2. What problem do you have?... Booker loved those Saturday morning conferences rewarded by the highlight of the weekend—his mother's huge breakfast feasts. Banquets, really. Hot biscuits, short and flaky; grits, snow-white and tongue-burning hot; eggs beaten into pale saffron creaminess; sizzling sausage patties, sliced tomatoes, strawberry jam, freshly squeezed orange juice, cold milk in Mason jars.

But finally Booker too turns out to have had a youthful brush with tragedy

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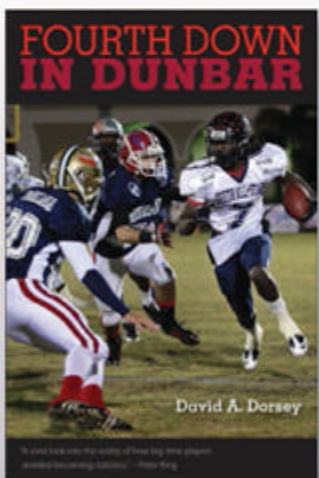
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that has deeply affected his response to the world and “hurtled him away from the rip and wave of life.”

After the first few chapters we may begin to realize that *God Help the Child* is not so unlike Morrison's previous novels as its setting and surface might lead us to conclude. Quite a few of her books have featured an injurious familial relationship. Sweetness's rejection of Lula Ann is less appalling than the violence that Sethe inflicts on her daughter in *Beloved*, or the death of Plum, burned alive by his mother in *Sula*. Many of these murders and desertions are, Morrison suggests, responses to the evils of slavery and to the pressures of raising a family in a racist society—pressures so destabilizing that a woman may feel that the only way to safeguard her child is to kill it, or at least kill its spirit. As Sweetness says, “I may have done some hurtful things to my only child because I had to protect her. Had to. All because of skin privileges.”

Indeed, a number of recurrent themes connect this book to its predecessors: the influence that racism, class, culture, and history exert over every large and small interaction; the ease with which sex can rearrange one's plans; the ineradicable loneliness that is among the most painful and valuable components of the self; the effects of belonging to, or feeling exiled from, a community. In this novel, as in *Sula*, Morrison's frankness about the way in which competition over a man can undermine a close female friendship is typical of her willingness to let observation override the idealized and the politically correct. And the romance between Bride and Booker—the magnetism of their attraction, the differences in their backgrounds—recalls the affair between Jadine Childs, a fashion model, and the rootless Son in *Tar Baby*.

The vein of magical realism that has run through Morrison's work—in *Beloved*, an angry ghost wreaks havoc in a Cincinnati home; in *Song of Solomon*, a laborer rises out of the cotton fields and flies through the air—surfaces here in the somatic changes that threaten to turn the voluptuous, confident Bride back into the unloved, undernourished Lula Ann, a “crazed transformation back into a scared little black girl.” First Bride's body hair disappears, followed by the holes in her pierced ears. She loses weight, stops menstruating, and her breasts vanish, leaving only nipples:

No one had noticed or commented on the changes in her body, how flat the T-shirt hung on her chest, the unpierced earlobes. Only she knew about unshaved but absent armpit and pubic hair. So all of this might be a hallucination, like the vivid dreams she was having when she managed to fall asleep. Or were they?

After one such dream, an erotic fantasy about Booker, Bride understands that “the body changes began not simply after he left, but because he left.”

Oddly, we may have less trouble accepting these occult occurrences than we do in believing some of the book's more realistic moments. Having learned that Sofia Huxley is about to be released, Bride—unlike the other

prosecution witnesses who may be dismayed and even frightened to learn that the person they helped convict is getting out—follows her from the prison to a motel, knocks on the door, and introduces herself. Certain that Sofia will be glad to receive “something friendly without strings,” Bride presents her with a sort of swag bag full of goodies chosen to ease her transition from incarceration to freedom:

I'd been planning this trip for a year, choosing carefully what a parolee would need: I saved up five thousand dollars in cash over the years, and bought a three-thousand-dollar Continental Airlines certificate. I put a promotional box of YOU, GIRL into a brand-new Louis Vuitton shopping bag, all of which could take her anywhere. Comfort her, anyway; help her forget and take the edge off bad luck, hopelessness and boredom.

Predictably, Sofia fails to appreciate this gesture of goodwill, and beats Bride so severely that her battered face requires reconstructive surgery from which she does not recover for many months. Readers may well wonder: Has Bride—who may be self-involved and shallow but is by no means stupid or entirely insensitive—really imagined that Sofia would be grateful for her gift, especially in view of the fact that Sofia was imprisoned partly because of Bride's testimony? Did it not occur to this savvy businesswoman that the terms of Sofia's parole might preclude her using the airline travel certificate at any time in the near future? Are we to conclude that our heroine's moral compass and common sense have been set so thoroughly askew by her bad treatment as a child and then immersion in capitalist beauty culture? Is a predilection for stubborn self-justification one of the traits she has inherited or learned from Sweetness?

Not only does Bride fail to understand why her friendly overture is rejected, but she blames and resents Sofia for her ingratitude:

The bitch didn't even hear me out. I wasn't the only witness, the only one who turned Sofia Huxley into 0071140. There was lots of other testimony about her molestations.... Even Sofia Huxley, of all people, erased me. A convict. A convict! She could have said, “No thanks,” or even “Get out!” No. She went postal. Maybe fistfighting is prison talk. Instead of words, broken bones and drawing blood is inmate conversation.

A similarly puzzling moment comes later in the novel, when Bride's search for Booker leads her to the home of his aunt, a warmhearted and maternal woman named Queen, who shows Bride some pages on which Booker has jotted down what appear to be random musings:

Hey girl what's inside your curly head besides dark rooms with dark men dancing too close to comfort the mouth hungry for more of what it is sure is there somewhere out there waiting for a tongue and some breath to stroke teeth that bite the night and swallow whole

the world denied you so get rid of those smokey dreams and lie on the beach in my arms while I cover you with white sands from shores you have never seen lapped by waters so crystal and blue they make you shed tears of bliss and let you know that you do belong finally to the planet you were born on and can now join the out-there world in the deep peace of a cello.

After reading this paragraph, a woman of Bride's sophistication might reasonably decide that perhaps the breakup might not have been such a bad idea. Yet Bride is enchanted by what she feels she has learned from him:

Bride shook her head. She had counted on her looks for so long—how well beauty worked. She had not known its shallowness or her own cowardice—the vital lesson Sweetness taught and nailed to her spine to curve it.

Equally vexing is the question of why it takes the intelligent, perceptive Booker—a reader of Walter Benjamin, Frederick Douglass, Melville, Dickens, and Robert Hass—so long to figure out Bride's closely guarded secret about the falseness of her testimony against Sofia, something that we will likely have intuited early on in the novel. In the final chapters, Booker learns what really occurred when Bride was a child. But by then we may be wondering how we could have spent so much time in Bride's company without suspecting the truth about her experience. It's one thing to withhold information from the reader, but quite another to feel that a character is withholding information from herself.

Admittedly, repression can cause one to forget the past, but that's not what seems to be happening here. And this sacrifice of plausibility in order to arrange a climactic, expiatory confession weakens the novel, much as *Crime and Punishment* would have been weakened had Dostoevsky delayed revealing, until the end, the fact that Raskolnikov had murdered two old women. Toni Morrison's great talent and her passion for her subject—the mistreatment of children, and the heroic effort required to transcend the residual damage of abuse—would have sufficed to propel us through these pages without the artifice that makes Bride more of a construct than a fully realized character.

One reason why we may have less trouble accepting the magical elements in the book than some of the more apparently naturalistic ones is that we have learned to suspend our disbelief in the presence of something that, we feel, could never occur. But when we are shown “real” people interacting in what we assume to be the “real world,” the writer—regardless of the authority of her narrative voice, or of her prodigious ability to will characters and events onto the page—is obliged to persuade us that a person might think and behave in the ways we observe her reflecting and acting.

If Bride remains to some extent opaque, it's at least partly because—especially in the more poetic passages—we have trouble visualizing

and understanding what exactly she is seeing and telling us. In pain, following an automobile accident, she notes that “the piece of sky she could glimpse was a dark carpet of knives pointed at her and aching to be released.” And it's hard to know what to make of either the language or the logic of this description of a rustic landscape:

A city girl is quickly weary of the cardboard boredom of tiny rural towns. Whatever the weather, iron-bright sunshine or piercing rain, the impression of worn boxes hiding shiftless residents seems to sap the most attentive gaze.... Bride wasn't feeling superior to the line of tiny, melancholy houses and mobile homes on each side of the road, just puzzled.

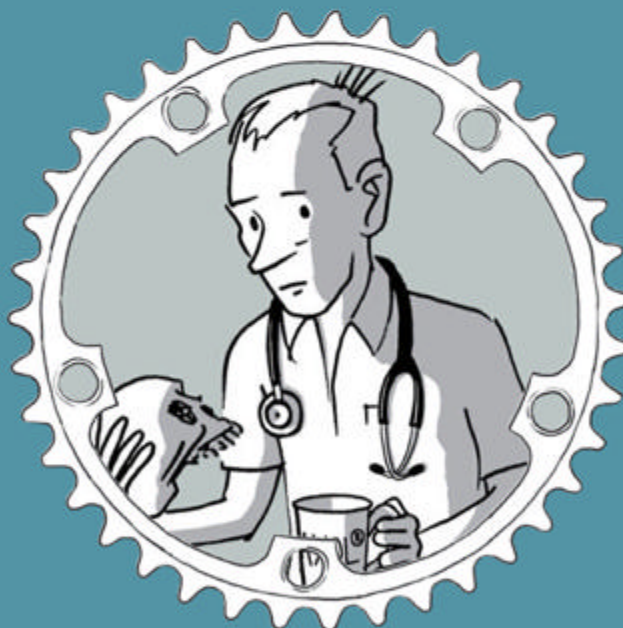
What exactly is “cardboard boredom”? Does one feel superior to houses or to the residents of those houses? And if Bride isn't feeling superior to these country folk, why does she describe them as “shiftless”?

Does the heady atmosphere of the mythic free the writer from having to pay attention to the details that, if gotten wrong, can distract the reader and briefly cast us out of the novel? We can only try to imagine why little Rain, who has grown up on the city streets, should be so mystified by the sight of a black woman. Or why, when Bride's secret finally emerges, no one—not Bride, or Booker, or Queen—so much as considers informing the authorities, so that restitution (ideally including some form of financial compensation) could be made.

In view of the scope and the gravity of Morrison's themes and ambitions, why should such points matter? They do, because plausibility depends on the writer's punctiliousness about just such details as these.

Ultimately, *God Help the Child* had the effect of making me want to go back to Toni Morrison's earlier novels, among them *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*, which remain my favorites. These are wonderful books in which we are convinced by the naturalistic no less than the fantastic. They owe their power to the pure force of storytelling and the effect of precise and transparent language. We continue to reread them because they work on multiple levels and because we admire and believe every word. □

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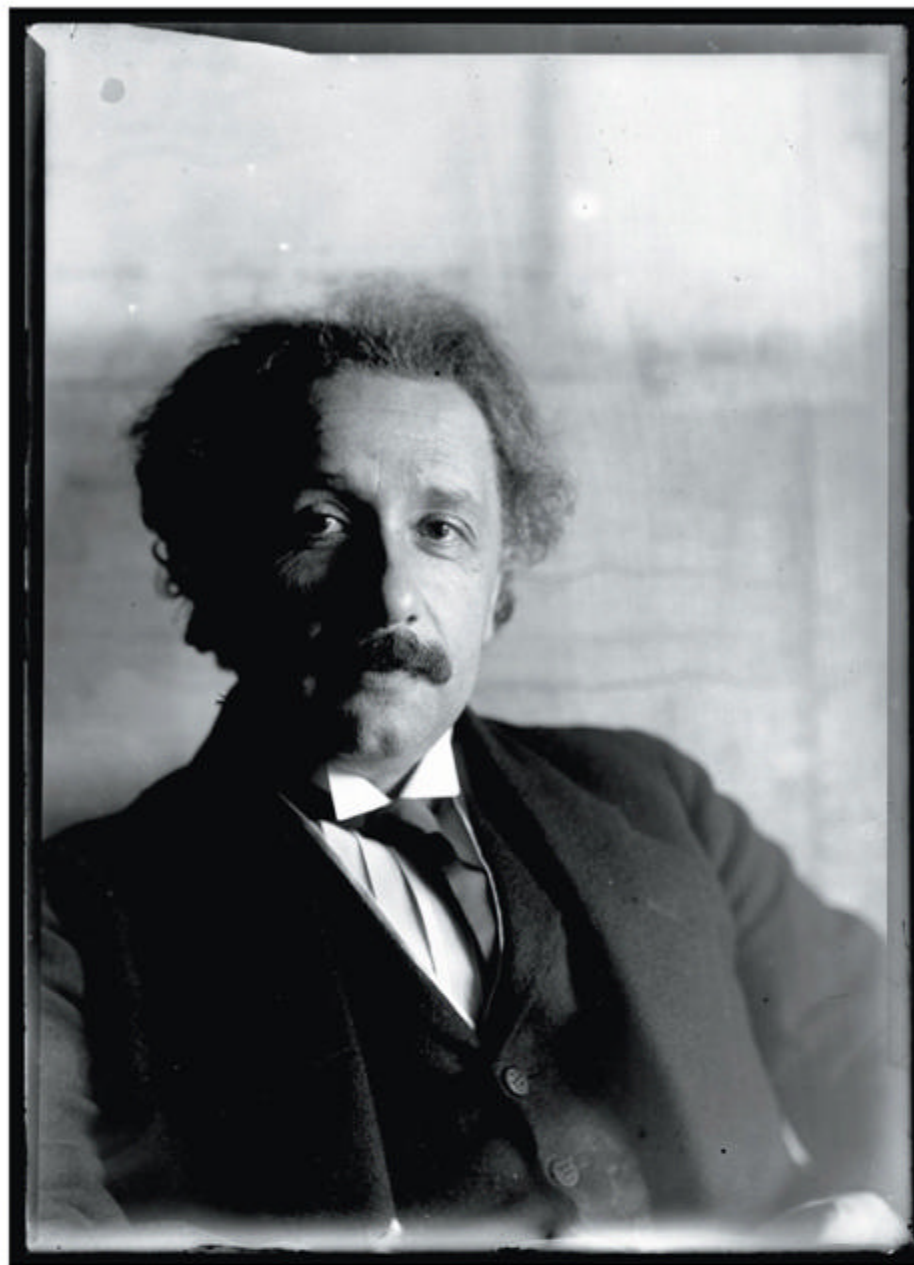
Why would anybody want to write another book about Albert Einstein? Why would anybody want to read it? These are two separate questions, but both of them have satisfactory answers. In spite of the large number of books already written about Einstein, there is still room for one more.

There were several good reasons for writing this book. Yale University Press is publishing a big series of short biographies under the heading "Jewish Lives." Among the twenty already published are Sigmund Freud, Franz Kafka, Sarah Bernhardt, Mark Rothko, and Leon Trotsky. Among the twenty-five announced as forthcoming are Benjamin Disraeli, Bob Dylan, Jesus, and Moses. Einstein obviously belongs on this list.

John Reed in his eyewitness report, *Ten Days That Shook the World*, describing the Bolshevik Revolution in Petrograd in 1917, proclaimed Leon Trotsky to be "the greatest Jew since Jesus." Over the last hundred years, Einstein has displaced Trotsky as the second-brightest star of the Jewish pantheon. It would be absurd to display a gallery of famous Jews without putting Einstein in a prominent place. Another reason this Einstein book is welcome is that it is short. Most of the earlier books are much longer, with detailed and lengthy accounts of Einstein's personal life and scientific thinking. The time is now ripe for a short book, summarizing briefly the well-known facts about Einstein's rocky road as a husband and father and scientist, and emphasizing his lasting importance as a politician and a philosopher. This book is accurate and well balanced. It presents Einstein's Jewish heritage as he saw it himself, not as the core of his being, but as a historical accident bringing inescapable responsibilities.

The reasons for reading this book are also simple. The majority of famous scientists have books written about them that are of interest to historians and specialists. The scientists remain famous for a few decades and then gradually fade. The books contain almost all the information about them that is worth preserving. But there are a few scientists whose lives and thoughts are of perennial interest, because they permanently changed our way of thinking. To the few belong Galileo and Newton and Darwin, and now Einstein. For the select few, there will be no end to the writing of books. New books will need to be written and read, because these people had enduring ideas that throw light on new problems as the centuries go by.

The later chapters of Steven Gimbel's book describe Einstein's deep involvement with the Zionist movement, promoting the settlement of Jews in Palestine. Einstein saw these settlements as a benefit both to Jews and to Arabs, giving Jews a place to live and prosper, and giving Arabs a chance to share the blessings of progress and prosperity. In 1929, when some Palestinian Arabs organized a violent opposition to Jewish settlement and killed



Albert Einstein, Vienna, 1921

some Jews, the British colonial government suppressed the rebellion and enforced a peaceful coexistence of Jews and Arabs. But Einstein understood that this enforced coexistence could not last. He wrote an article with the title "Jew and Arab" from which Gimbel quotes:

The first and most important necessity is the creation of a modus vivendi with the Arab people. Friction is perhaps inevitable, but its evil consequences must be overcome by organized cooperation, so that the inflammable material may not be piled up to the point of danger. The absence of contact in every-day life is bound to produce an atmosphere of mutual fear and distrust, which is favorable to such lamentable outbursts of passion as we have witnessed. We Jews must show above all that our own history of suffering has given us sufficient understanding and psychological insight to know how to cope with this problem of psychology and organization: the more so as no irreconcilable differences stand in the way of peace between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. Let us therefore above all be on our guard against blind chauvinism of any kind, and let us not imagine that reason and common-sense can be replaced with British bayonets.

Einstein worked with Chaim Weizmann, the leader of the Zionist organization, to raise money for the settlements and for the foundation of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. But while he worked with Weizmann as a fund-raiser, he disagreed fundamentally with Weizmann's aims for the future. In the early days, before Israel existed, Einstein was opposed to the idea of a Jewish state. Weizmann aimed from the beginning to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, and he lived long enough to see his dreams come true, serving as the first president of the State of Israel. After the State of Israel was established, Einstein gave it his full support. But he said that a peaceful and permanent presence of Jews in Palestine could only be possible if they worked side by side with Arabs under conditions of social and political equality.

Einstein felt a deep personal responsibility for the actions of the Jewish community to which he never wholeheartedly belonged. He tried with all his strength to stop the Jewish people from becoming another nationalistic culture glorifying military strength, like the militaristic German culture that he had hated as a child and repudiated as a teenager when he renounced his German citizenship. He continued to support Israel while severely criticiz-

ing it. At the end of his life, when he had become an American citizen, he felt an equally deep responsibility for the actions of the American community to which he never wholeheartedly belonged. He had gone through the ritual of naturalization, but he remained an alien spirit in America.

He saw the American people, after their victory over Germany and Japan, sliding into the same militaristic arrogance that overcame the German people after their victory over France in 1871. He had experienced in Berlin in 1914 the insane enthusiasm with which the German people, including his scientist friends and colleagues, welcomed the outbreak of World War I. He saw the same insanity taking root in America, with patriotic citizens imagining that the possession of nuclear weapons would give America the power to rule the world. Just as he spoke out against the militarization of Israel, he spoke out against the militarization of America. He spoke with particular clarity against the delusion that staying ahead in the race to develop nuclear weapons could give America a permanent national security.

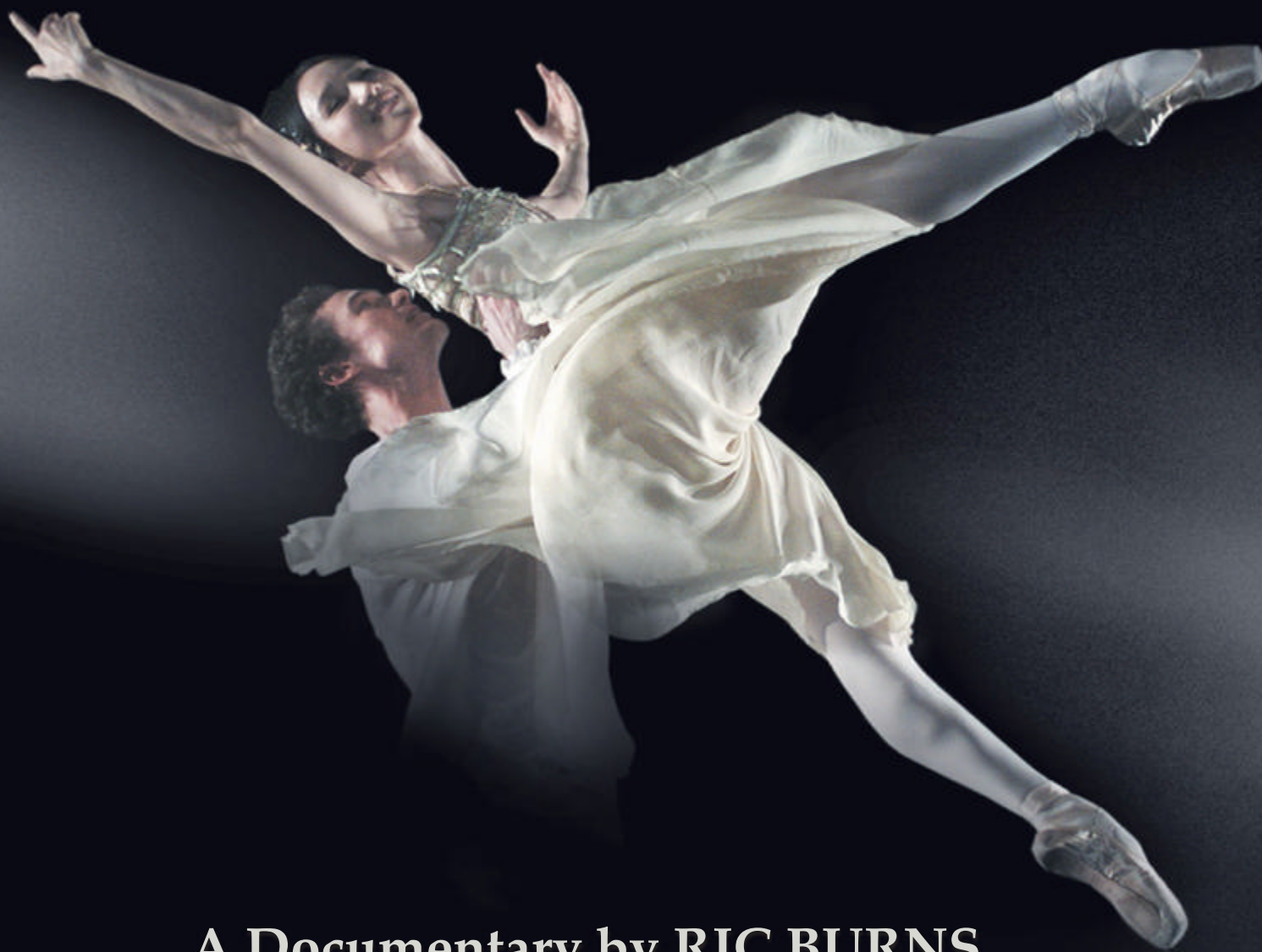
Gimbel quotes an excerpt from Einstein's statement reacting to President Truman's announcement in 1950 that the United States was developing a hydrogen bomb:

The arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union, initiated originally as a preventive measure, assumes hysterical proportions. On both sides, means of mass destruction are being perfected with feverish haste and behind walls of secrecy. And now the public has been advised that the production of the hydrogen bomb is the new goal which will probably be accomplished. An accelerated development toward this end has been solemnly proclaimed by the President. If these efforts should prove successful, radioactive poisoning of the atmosphere and, hence, annihilation of all life on earth will have been brought within the range of what is technically possible. The weird aspect of this development lies in its apparently inexorable character. Each step appears as the inevitable consequence of the one that went before. And at the end, looming ever clearer, lies general annihilation.

These words have had a lasting impact. Many world leaders, civilian and military, have made similar statements during the subsequent sixty years. More importantly, the governments of powerful countries have behaved cautiously, showing by their actions that they do not consider victory in a major war to be a meaningful objective. Wars continue to be fought, but they are mostly local in scale and extended in time, as different as possible from a nuclear holocaust that could destroy half the world in a few hours. Military leaders in all countries have learned that nuclear weapons are not very useful. They are effective for murdering huge numbers of people in a short time, but not for winning real battles in real

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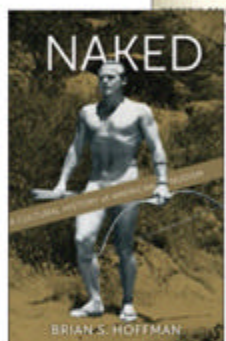
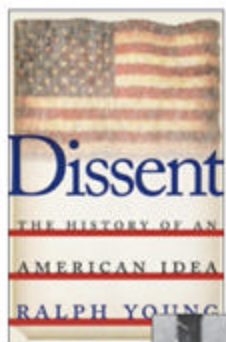
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wars. For almost all situations in local wars, nuclear weapons are too big and the targets are too small.

From 1945 until the end of his life in 1955, Einstein saw the abolition of nuclear weapons as a necessary objective. Abolition was for him the only way to save mankind from the threat of nuclear destruction. He was not sure how abolition could be achieved. Sometimes he spoke of a world government with power to stop nuclear activities in every country. Sometimes he spoke of formal agreements between existing governments. Sometimes he spoke about abolishing war as well as abolishing nuclear weapons. He understood that any abolition of war or of weapons would require a radical change in our way of thinking.

The essential first step, before any abolition agreement could be effective, was to educate the public. The public and the political leaders must understand that nuclear weapons were not only intolerably dangerous but also militarily useless. Once these facts of life were clearly understood, there would be a fighting chance that an abolition agreement could work. Einstein did whatever he could in his final years to educate the public.

In the last month of his life, he joined with Bertrand Russell to make a public statement that he did not live to see published. Here are its concluding words:

In view of the fact that in any future world war nuclear weapons will certainly be employed, and that such weapons threaten the continued existence of mankind, we urge the Governments of the world to realize, and to acknowledge publicly, that their purposes cannot be furthered by a world war, and we urge them, consequently, to find peaceful means for the settlement of all matters of dispute between them.

After the Russell-Einstein manifesto was published, there grew out of it an organization called the Pugwash movement, bringing together scientists from East and West to discuss the problems of war and weapons. The name Pugwash came from the small town in eastern Canada where the first meeting was held in 1957. Since that time, meetings have been held in many countries, continuing up to the present day. The basic idea of the meetings is that science gives to scientists of all countries a common language, so that they can understand one another even when talking about political and human problems having little to do with science.

Politicians and diplomats have much greater difficulty in understanding one another. Scientists have long experience of working together in an international enterprise that pays no attention to national or ideological differences. At the beginning, Bertrand Russell himself presided over the Pugwash meetings. After Russell retired, the leadership was taken over by Joseph Rotblat, a Polish nuclear physicist who worked at Los Alamos and became famous as the only scientist who walked out of Los Alamos for reasons of conscience in 1944, when it became known that Germany did not have a serious nuclear weapons project. General Les-

lie Groves let him go after he promised not to tell his friends the reason for his departure. Rotblat ran the Pugwash meetings for forty years. He won the respect of all the participants and many of their governments.

I attended several of the early Pugwash meetings under the auspices of Russell and Rotblat. At that time they were acting as a valuable back channel for exchanging views between the American and Soviet governments, when the official diplomatic channel was blocked by ideological disagreements. The two dominant personalities were Leó Szilárd on the American side and Vladimir Pavlichenko on the So-

sages between Israel and hostile Arab states in the Middle East, and between India and Pakistan in Asia. The hope expressed by Einstein is still alive, that our way of thinking could one day change, and abolition of war and weapons could become possible.

Less than half of Gimbel's book is about Einstein's politics. The rest of it is about his science and his philosophy. In this review I reverse the proportions, giving more space to politics and less to philosophy. Einstein's philosophy grew directly out of his science. During the ten years from 1905 to 1915, he created



Niels Bohr and Albert Einstein, circa 1920

viet side. Szilárd was an old friend of Einstein from Einstein's Berlin days. He wrote the letter that Einstein signed in 1939, warning President Roosevelt that nuclear weapons were a possibility, that uranium was the crucial material for their manufacture, and that it was important to keep the rich uranium ores of the Belgian Congo out of the hands of Hitler.

Szilárd had also tried in vain to deliver an appeal to President Truman in 1945, urging him to give Japan warning and an opportunity to surrender before dropping nuclear bombs on Japanese cities. Pavlichenko was the KGB man on the Soviet side, sent to Pugwash conferences along with the scientists to make sure that they did not deviate from the Soviet line. He was highly intelligent and well informed about technical and political questions. He knew far more than the scientists about the actions and intentions of his own government.

Szilárd immediately recognized Pavlichenko as the man to talk to when serious issues were discussed. Any proposal made to Pavlichenko would reach high levels in the Soviet government. Szilárd had friends at high levels in the American government, and so this unlikely pair, the Hungarian rebel and the KGB apparatchik, worked fruitfully together to carry messages in both directions. Now, fifty years later, Pugwash meetings are carrying mes-

a new view of the physical universe, including atoms and light-quanta, space and time, electromagnetism and gravitation, with all their motions and interactions governed by precise mathematical laws. His theories were tested by observation and experiment and found to be correct. On the basis of this dazzling success, he built a philosophy.

A philosophy for Einstein meant a general view of nature into which the scientific details can fit. His philosophy describes nature as a single layer of observable objects with strict causality governing their movements. If the state of affairs at the present time is precisely known, then the laws of nature allow the state at a future time to be precisely predicted. The uncertainty of our knowledge of the future arises only from the uncertainty of our knowledge of the past and present. I call this view of nature the classical philosophy, since all objects obey the laws of classical physics.

Ten years after Einstein completed his theories, Werner Heisenberg and Erwin Schrödinger invented quantum mechanics, describing the behavior of atoms and light-quanta in a radically different way. Experiments confirmed that quantum mechanics gives a true picture of atomic processes that Einstein's theories could not explain. Niels Bohr worked out a philosophy, generally known as the Copenhagen interpretation, to explain quantum

Science Society and Picture Library/Getty Images

mechanics. I prefer to call it the dualistic philosophy, since it describes the universe as consisting of two layers. The first layer is the classical world of Einstein, with objects that are directly observable but no longer predictable. They have become unpredictable because they are driven by events in the second layer that we cannot see. The second layer is the quantum world, with states that are not directly observable but obey simple laws. For example, the laws of the second layer decree that every particle travels along every possible path with a probability that depends in a simple way on the path.

The two layers are connected by probabilistic rules, so that the quantum state of an object tells us only the probabilities that it will do various things. The dualistic philosophy allows us to divide our knowledge of nature into facts and probabilities. Observation of the first layer gives us facts about what happened in the past, but only gives us probabilities about what may happen in the future. The future is uncertain because the processes in the second layer are unobservable. The power and the beauty of quantum mechanics arise from the fact that the physical laws in the second layer are precisely linear.

All points in a linear theory are equal, and a linear space has perfect symmetry about any of its points. As a result of the linearity of the laws, the second layer possesses a wealth of marvelous symmetries that are only partially visible in the first layer. For example, in the first layer, symmetries between space and time are only partly visible. In daily life, we do not mix up inches with seconds or miles with days. In the second layer, as the result of Paul Dirac's elegant equation describing the quantum behavior of the electron, the mixing of space with time in the electron's movements would be clearly visible. But we do not live in the second layer, and so the mixing is hidden from us.

The dualistic philosophy gives a natural frame for the new sciences of particle physics and relativistic cosmology that emerged in the twentieth century after Einstein and Bohr were dead. The new sciences are dominated by mathematical symmetries that are exact in the second layer and approximate in the first layer. The dualistic philosophy seems to me to represent accurately our present state of knowledge. It says that the classical world and the quantum world are both real, but the way they fit together is not yet completely understood. The dualistic philosophy is flexible enough to accept unexpected discoveries and conceptual revolutions.

Now, eighty years after the dualistic philosophy was invented by Bohr, it is generally regarded by the younger generation of physicists as obsolete. The younger generation mostly rejects duality and accepts what I call the quantum-only philosophy. The quantum-only philosophy says that the classical world is an illusion and only the quantum world exists. The concept of a classical world arose because the effects of quantum mechanics are rapidly erased by a phenomenon known as decoherence. Decoherence hides the quantum world by destroying rapidly the waves arising from quantum effects. After the waves have disappeared, whatever is left obeys classical laws and looks

like a classical world. According to the quantum-only philosophy, the marvelous harmony of Einstein's classical universe is only an approximation, valid when quantum waves happen to be small enough to be neglected.

To summarize the present situation, there are three ways to understand philosophically our observations of the physical universe. The classical philosophy of Einstein has everything in a single layer obeying classical laws, with quantum processes unexplained. The quantum-only philosophy has included everything in a single layer obeying quantum laws, with the astonishing solidity and uniqueness of the classical illusion unexplained. The dualistic philosophy gives reality impartially to the classical vision of Einstein and to the quantum vision of Bohr, with the

details of the connection between the two layers unexplained. All three philosophies are tenable, and all three are incomplete. I prefer the dualistic philosophy because I give equal weight to the insights of Einstein and Bohr. I do not believe that the celestial harmonies discovered by Einstein are an accidental illusion.

Einstein in real life was not only a great politician and a great philosopher. He was also a great observer of the human comedy, with a robust sense of humor. The third side of Einstein's personality is not emphasized by Gimbel, but was an important cause of his immense popularity. He came as an observer to my boarding school in England in 1931, a few years before I arrived there. He was in England as the guest of Frederick Lindemann, an Ox-

ford physicist who was also a friend and adviser to Winston Churchill.

Lindemann took him to the school to meet one of the boys who was a family friend. The boy was living in Second Chamber, in an ancient building where the walls are ornamented with marble memorials to boys who occupied the rooms in past centuries. Einstein and Lindemann wandered by mistake into the adjoining First Chamber, which had been converted from a living room to a bathroom. In First Chamber, the marble memorials were preserved, but underneath them on the walls were hooks where boys had hung their smelly football clothes. Einstein surveyed the scene for a while in silence, and then said: "Now I understand: the spirits of the departed pass over into the trousers of the living." □



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Ukraine: Inside the Deadlock

Tim Judah

Last September, a few weeks before Ukraine's general election, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, then as now prime minister, issued a pamphlet listing his aims. One was stark: "To get through the winter." Given that rebel soldiers in the eastern part of the country paint "To Kiev!" on their tanks, that Ukraine relies on Russia for much of its energy, and that its economy is in dire straits, it is nonetheless safe to say that he has succeeded. The rebels, despite inflicting two major recent defeats on the government forces, have not advanced significantly. Winter power cuts in regions unaffected by the war were short and survivable. Also, while the current cease-fire, agreed to on February 12, is not expected to last, Ukraine and its government have not collapsed, nor do they show any signs of being on the brink of doing so, as some of the Russian media keep saying hopefully.

As winter turns to spring, soldiers on both sides of the front line are anything but tired of the war. Spirits are high and demoralization and exhaustion have not yet set in. Both sides are better organized than before and their commanders are trying to second-guess where the other will attack when the cease-fire breaks down completely, as they all assume it will soon. If and when it does, there are three main possible outcomes. The first is that the rebels, with the Russian support they need, will take more territory and, depending on how easy it is for them to advance, will push north, west, and south as far as they can. The second is that the Ukrainians will retake territory and push the rebels back, but this can happen only if Vladimir Putin decides not to help the rebels any longer. The third is that even with the front line moving somewhat one way or another, the conflict will morph into a frozen one.

In the latter case, the self-declared Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics together will become a giant version of all the other post-Soviet frozen conflicts, such as Transnistria in Moldova or Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia. In these places Russia is in de facto control of slices of other countries, but they have not much of an economy or prospects of a brighter future for their people, and so the young and dynamic leave. We cannot know what Putin may decide to do, but right now this third outcome seems the most likely.

There is a big gap between what leaders on either side want and what is attainable. On the Ukrainian side the maximum and, for now, unattainable objective is to reconquer the lost eastern territories. (No one is even talking about Crimea, which, as far as Russia is concerned, has formally become a part of the Russian state.) What is far more realistic, though, is for Ukraine to hold the line to prevent further losses, while over the next few years its armed forces are transformed into a far more formidable fighting force. British military trainers are already in Ukraine and American ones are due to arrive in April, while shipments of American army vehicles have already begun to arrive.

According to the two cease-fire agreements signed in Minsk, the sec-



Galya Malchik, a resident of Karapyshi, Ukraine, who told Tim Judah that a local man with a truck had asked for donations of food for Ukrainian troops in the east, but that he received so much that he left before she could give him her contribution, March 2015

ond on February 12, the two break-away regions of eastern Ukraine are supposed to gain a higher degree of autonomy than other parts of the country. Legislation has been passed to that effect by the parliament in Kiev. But while we can safely assume that the rebels were forced to agree to this by Putin, who certainly wanted to avert the imposition of new economic sanctions on Russia by Western countries, it is clear that the rebels have no intention of letting their regions ever become functioning parts of Ukraine again. Andrei Purgin, one of the most powerful men in Donetsk and the speaker of its parliament, told me that this could only happen if Ukraine became a "different country" from the one it is now. That is to say that its government would be so pro-Russian that Ukraine would be a Russian satellite.

In the short term, however, the rebel leaders have other immediate goals. Now that they control about one third of the territory of their two eastern "oblasts," or provinces, they have declared that at the very minimum they

want to go to their oblast borders (see the map on page 20).

In theory, the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, or to use their Russian acronyms the DNR and LNR, are supposed to be uniting as the federal state of Novorossiya, or "New Russia." In fact, apart from a flag and to a certain extent the army, that project has remained on paper, as have its territorial ambitions, which take in much of the east and south of Ukraine. But for some, even those territories would not be enough.

Sergei Baryshnikov, one of the leading local ideologists of Novorossiya and the rector of Donetsk University, told me that we were now "at the first stage" of the recreation of a Russian state that would eventually take in everything that had once belonged to pre-revolutionary, imperial Russia. That would mean most of modern Ukraine and the three Baltic states. The exception would be Lviv and the far west of Ukraine, which before 1941 had be-

RECENT BOOKS ABOUT UKRAINE

A number of recent books provide essential background on Ukraine. *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* by US academics Rajan Menon and Eugene B. Rumer (MIT Press, 2015) is a short and insightful primer that concentrates on the current crisis to give readers a brief but useful introduction to the history of the country.

Coming at the subject from a different angle is *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West* by British scholar Andrew Wilson (Yale University Press, 2014), who in 2000 wrote *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, which is now in its third edition (Yale University Press, 2009) and takes the country's modern history up to 2009.

For the new book he observed the Maidan revolution.

To anyone who wants to delve deeper into the history of eastern Ukraine, two books will be of interest. In *The Iron Tsar: The Life and Times of John Hughes* (Author Essentials, 2010), Roderick Heather tells the extraordinary tale of a barely literate Welshman who founded Donetsk in 1870, bringing his knowledge of coal, iron, and steel from his native Wales. A shorter book on the history of Donetsk is *Dreaming a City: From Wales to Ukraine* by Colin Thomas (Y Lolfa, 2009), which comes with a DVD of three documentaries made by Thomas and a Welsh historian about the history of the city. □

longed to Poland, and to the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918. They might be left out of the new expanded Russia. But he sees the restoration of the imperial Russian borders as "our historical mission." The very idea of a Ukrainian nation was like a cancer and needed to be extirpated, he said.

Whether or not everyone in the local leadership agrees with Baryshnikov and his call for a struggle that he believes could last years or decades is not so important. What is important is that his are ideas that feed into the creation of a general worldview, not just of the rebels but in policymaking circles close to Putin, whom Baryshnikov described as "our president" and "de facto, our leader."

The problem for the DNR and LNR leaders is that even taking control of their entire oblasts, let alone advancing as far as, say, Odessa, has proved, as Purgin says, "impossible" thus far. Likewise it has proved impossible for the Ukrainians to achieve more than the odd minor victory in pushing the rebels back during the last seven months. In January, Donetsk airport, which had been fought over in bouts of varying intensity since the beginning of the war, finally fell to the DNR, as did Debalsteve, three days after the February cease-fire was supposed to come into effect. Here the Ukrainians had found themselves trapped on three sides.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko tried to downplay the significance of these defeats, and the rebels trumpeted their victories. The reality was that while the Ukrainians were indeed defeated, they had managed to hold on for a very long time in both places. As interviews with disillusioned soldiers from Russia in the Russian and foreign press have shown, there are constantly fluctuating numbers of regular Russian troops and volunteers aiding the rebels. Why, in that case, did the rebels take so long to conquer these places? Perhaps militarily the Russians and the rebels may not be that good and the Ukrainians, who originally were hopelessly disorganized, may not be so bad.

The test of whether the conflict has reached a stalemate will come at Mariupol. In late August rebel forces advanced rapidly along the coast of the Sea of Azov, to within shelling distance of the eastern outskirts of this grimy steel town and port. It is home to some 500,000 people, including an estimated 30,000 refugees. Then there was panic and many fled, thinking an assault was imminent.

Ever since, not only have the rebels failed to advance, but in one place they have been pushed back by the Ukrainians, including men from the small but highly motivated Azov Battalion. It is notorious for having neo-Nazi members and a Nazi-like symbol, though many may join the unit not for these reasons, but because it is successful. Moreover, while the Azov Battalion gets all the headlines, other Ukrainian military units have also spent months preparing the defense of the city. For whatever reason the rebels and the Russians hesitated to attack in the au-

turnn, and taking the city today would be far harder than it would have been then. Ukraine's forces, one security source told me, are in much better shape than before, although he conceded that "that is still not enough."

Then as now, Mariupol and this region along the coast are divided. Here I met both staunch pro-Ukrainians and people who think their future would be better if they were part of the DNR and Russia. But above all, as the war drags on, it is clear that many of those who dislike Ukraine are not prepared to sacrifice lives or property for the sake of the rebels or Russia. They just want the war to stop. On social media pro-Russians are constantly announcing the beginning of one anti-Ukrainian uprising or another; in the end they let their fantasies get the better of them. The uprisings are not happening. Part of the problem is that on the rebel and Russian side, so much of the political and media narrative constructed about Ukraine goes back to World War II, with the Ukrainians now playing the part of the Nazis. Many thus mistake a small number of real neo-Nazis flaunting their swastikas on Facebook for a horde of millions, and are thus disappointed when eastern towns do not revolt in a glorious rerun of the Warsaw Uprising.

Many of those in the east who never felt pro-Ukrainian have also begun to see that the DNR and LNR have become twilight zones. Banks in rebel territory have closed. ATMs are dead screens. Cash is hard to come by and those who still have jobs are lucky if their employer can find any to pay them. More and more easterners are unemployed and the economy has begun to

wither and die. Pensioners can't get their pensions there. It is becoming harder to get Ukrainian passes to cross back and forth from rebel territory. Large numbers of shops have closed and while food is available, there is less and less choice. In Donetsk, Maksim Petrovich Kalinichenko, acting dean of the economics faculty at Donetsk University, summed up the situation succinctly: "There is no economy today." When it came to the future, he could not really say anything, because it depended on how the war ended.

Donetsk is the hometown and business heartland of Rinat Akhmetov, Ukraine's richest oligarch. Last summer the rebels threatened to nationalize his property, coal mines, and steel plants. In the end they did no such thing. Akhmetov employs some 300,000 people. When the war began some muttered that the oligarch, who had been close to deposed Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, had somehow helped the separatists as a means of furthering his own interests. There was never any proof of this. Now, while the management of his firms has moved from Donetsk, all his workers who have not left rebel territory are still being paid, even if their mines or factories are not operating, though some still are. Akhmetov is also helping to feed tens of thousands of people with humanitarian aid. If he were not doing this, then the rebels and Russia would have to look after these people.

The complexity of the situation is even clearer in Mariupol. Here there are two giant steel plants owned by Akhme-

tov's Metinvest company, plus a third business. Together they directly employ 45,000 people. When you take account of how many families that means, plus how many jobs depend on the plants indirectly, from suppliers to port workers and so on, it is no exaggeration to say that Mariupol is a company town. The Ilyich iron and steel plant, which has been operating here since 1897, covers an area that straggles for nine miles from end to end.

The war has already placed the plant under huge strain. It used to get 100 percent of the coke it needs for its furnaces from Akhmetov's coke and steel plant in Avdiivka, just on the Ukrainian side of the front line near Donetsk. Rebel shells have hit the Avdiivka plant, but some two thousand workers have literally moved in to help keep it running because if its furnaces ever all went cold, it would cost \$1 billion to restart them. If that happened, then the factory would probably never reopen and the workers would have lost their livelihoods in an area that no one would invest in again for many years.

Now, according to Yuriy Zinchenko, the general director of the Ilyich plant, only 20 percent of the coke he needs comes from Avdiivka. He has managed to find more in other places, including Russia, but he says that he firmly believes that his plant has a future only in a united Ukraine, and he has explained this to the workforce in no uncertain terms. If they become part of the twilight zone of the DNR, there would be no access to finance and exports to the West might end, as also might business with the rest of Ukraine. Today only

8 percent of their steel goes to Russia while the rest goes to the US, Italy, and elsewhere.

Inside the Ilyich plant huge vats spew flame and sparks and then slabs of bright glowing-amber steel plates roll out along the production line. Following an attempt to seize Mariupol last year, workers were asked to help patrol the town. According to Vitaly Voroshenko, a factory official, of 1,500 workers who were asked, 1,200 responded positively. Many pro-DNR activists from Mariupol, Odessa, and other southern towns have fled, thus decapitating the leadership of the pro-rebel cause in those parts of the south and east under Ukrainian control.

So the rebels have stalled. Mariupol is now far better defended than before and many have understood that coming under DNR control would deal a fatal blow to the economy of the town. And there is another factor at work here. According to Alex Ryabchyn, a young pro-Ukrainian economist from Donetsk who in October became a member of Ukraine's parliament, Putin has been given to understand that an assault on Mariupol is a red line.

Germany has opposed calls, especially from the US, to supply the modern arms that Ukraine needs. The German leaders believe that Russia would always respond by upping the ante because it regards Ukraine as belonging to its sphere of influence. But Ryabchyn told me that he had been told on a recent trip to Brussels that Angela Merkel would reconsider this position if Mariupol were attacked. Likewise, Western nations would reopen the possibility of banning Russia

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On January 24 a salvo of missiles lasting less than a minute hit Mariupol, killing thirty. Then nothing happened. In theory the rebel forces could isolate and surround the city if they moved westward to link up to Russian soldiers moving out from Crimea; but this would leave the rebels and the Russians with long supply lines and long lines to defend. None of this is impossible, but it would be very difficult and for Putin a huge gamble. If they have not done it until now, then maybe they will never do it.

In March President Poroshenko came into conflict with Igor Kolomoisky, another Ukrainian oligarch. The government passed legislation that had the effect of diminishing Kolomoisky's control of two energy companies. Kolomoisky, who has funded Ukrainian military battalions and is credited with doing much to keep his home region of Dnipropetrovsk out of rebel hands, sent armed men to defend his interests in the two companies in Kiev. It seemed as if a violent showdown was about to take place. Then Kolomoisky was sacked from his position in Dnipropetrovsk and capitulated without a fight.

There are two credible explanations of what this means. One is that the government is actually trying and succeeding in curbing the power of the oligarchs, who retain, in one form or another, deputies in parliament to defend their interests. The other is that in the constant oligarchical battle for assets and power, Kolomoisky overstepped and had his wings clipped by a more powerful oligarch—Poroshenko himself. Meanwhile parliament has been passing laws to reform everything from taxes to the traffic police to regional decentralization but much remains to be done and, especially in the current circumstances, it will take time, years even, before the results make a tangible difference to people's lives, and this is making them angry.

In Adminposiolok, a badly shattered rebel-held suburb of Donetsk, I met Ivan Tokarev, aged seventy-eight, who had come to try to clean up his apart-

When it comes to Ukrainian fighters in the east, however, lots of aid is getting through. Volunteer doctors from a group called Hospitallers have boxes of food and medicine donated by supporters at home and abroad. In Pisky, a mile or so from Adminposiolok, but on the Ukrainian side, they have a modern ambulance with a mobile surgical station to treat the wounded that has been donated by supporters in the US;



On the Ukrainian side of the lines, stories are similar. But it is clear that some of the changes that the war has wrought are going to be irreversible. In Kiev the price of renting an apartment has shot up because so many people have come from the east. Many of these people are from the educated middle classes; the longer the war drags on, the less chance there is of their ever going back. On the other side, hundreds of thousands have gone to Russia, and likewise, as they settle down, find jobs, and put down roots, many of them will never come back either. Of the region's pre-war population of some 4.5 million, more than 1.5 million are estimated to have left.

In the east aid comes from Russia, and while the Ukrainians say that these aid convoys carry military equipment, they carry food too. By chance I saw one such shipment of food being unloaded at Donetsk University. It is

In the central Ukrainian heartlands, in places where there is no ambivalence about which side people are on, the war no longer seems something utterly remote. In the village of Karapyshi, ninety minutes' drive south of Kiev, Galya Malchik, aged seventy, told me that a local man with a big truck called on everyone to give him potatoes, pickles, and salo, a traditional Ukrainian salted pork fat, which he would drive to the front to help the army. But before she got to deliver her contribution, he had already left because he had so much. Now she is waiting for the next time.

It has often been said recently, by way of warning, that Russians can endure phenomenal hardship and that in any Western calculations about the future of the war, this needs to be kept in mind. But the people who say this forget that in this fratricidal war, the same is true of Ukrainians. The cellars of Karapyshi and thousands of other villages are full of potatoes, pickles, and carrots covered in sand to better preserve them. A large proportion of city people throughout Ukraine still have relatives in their ancestral villages and if things become really dire they will look to them to help with food. Hardly anyone's stocks are depleted yet, and while some on both sides are hiding from the draft, there are still more than enough men ready, willing, and able to fight.

—Kiev, April 8, 2015

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An American Hero in China

Ian Johnson

1.

One night in September, three hundred people crowded into the basement auditorium of an office tower in Beijing to hear a discussion between two of China's most popular writers. One was Liu Yu, a thirty-eight-year-old political scientist and blogger who has written a best seller explaining how American democracy works. Her fans call her "goddess"—for her writings and her stylish looks.¹

But this evening, Liu was just a foil for the other writer: Peter Hessler, a low-key *New Yorker* journalist. Based in China until 2007, he later wrote on the American West and now lives in Egypt. Hessler has written three books on China and a collection of essays, all published in the US, and been recognized with a MacArthur fellowship.

In China, however, he has been transformed into a writer of cult-figure proportions whose fans analyze his love life, his translator's finances, and his children's education. An enthusiast has written a book imitating his prose style and retracing his career, while a men's fashion magazine flew a team from London to his summer home in Colorado to shoot a three-page photo spread. China has had celebrity authors before, but never a foreigner who writes on its most sensitive subject: itself.

I've known Hessler for fifteen years, but sat somewhat befuddled in the audience. As much as I enjoy his work, I couldn't help wondering why people in the audience seemed so impressed when he said his daughters were learning Arabic (not Chinese!), or clasped each other when he said he hoped to return to China one day (what mysteries about us will he unveil?).

Organizers had asked people to register for the event ahead of time, and more than one thousand signed up for the three hundred seats. People stood in the back of the room holding copies of his books, or milled around in the hallway hoping to catch a few words. Suddenly the evening began to have something rare in this staid city of twenty-odd million: the electricity of a genuine public event.

The authorities had done their best to prevent this. The talk was supposed to have been held at a nearby university, but administrators there had canceled at the last minute after receiving instructions that they weren't supposed to hold public events, especially one involving a liberal intellectual like Liu. As China's ideological atmosphere has tightened recently, she has curtailed her blog and seldom appears in public.

¹See my Q&A with Lu Yiu, "How to be a Chinese Democrat," *NYRblog*, February 3, 2015.

Liu seemed eager to make the most of this rare public forum. She pointedly discussed many of China's most sensitive issues: the democracy movement in Hong Kong, the Communist Party's recent decision to abolish the notorious system of reform through labor, and the closing down of a network of rural libraries suspected of promoting civil liberties.

"Are we touching on a sensitive issue now?" she joked with the audience, both knowing that they were, and that it was verboten.

Hessler, by contrast, kept to his writing persona: the wry observer who in his works on China has taken such a

The last questioner before the evening ended, though, had been slightly irritated by Hessler's neutrality. She was a young woman in a knit dress, and she stuttered as she tried to make her point: Shouldn't his writings be more than a description—shouldn't he try to help people?

Hessler shook his head. "My responsibility," he said, "is to write true things. That's enough."

2.

One of the most vexing questions for a writer on China is how best to

tations would have been to look at how lives had changed in this poor part of the country.

The answer is partly that reporters in free societies have an obligation to dissect problems. Journalists at home rarely write about the highways that work because this is assumed to be a given; what citizens need to know about is the backlog of unrepaired bridges. But when applied abroad, this practice means a steady stream of negative stories with no overall sense of the broad situation of the country—in the case of China, reports of dissidents, internecine contests for power, and impending crises.

Certainly the repression of dissidents must be known; and some positive stories do appear, for example, about the high-speed rail system or growing wealth. But even so, many are framed as negative stories: high-speed rail tickets are too expensive for the poor, or prosperity is conflated with a rising class of boorish and corrupt nouveaux riches. It may be that journalism is not the best medium for conveying the broadest social trends, but we still don't often hear about the quiet emergence of a true middle class of shopkeepers and tradespeople, or an internationally engaged, book-reading public eager to hear from the outside world.

Hessler's work challenges traditional coverage of China. I met him in 1999, when I hired him to be a researcher in the Beijing bureau of *The Wall*

Street Journal. By then he had already spent two years in the small Chinese city of Fuling as an English instructor at a teachers' college. He was living at home in Columbia, Missouri, having just completed the manuscript for *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*, but wanted to return to China to keep writing. I was impressed that he had experience in a fairly remote part of China and offered him a job over the phone.

Like all writers, Hessler's writing voice and actual personality are not the same. In his books, he is a good-natured midwesterner who gently introduces us to characters modestly described as friends or people he stumbled across. He never foists ideas on the reader, but lets them flow from his characters. Reading his books, it's hard not to like and trust him. One of the West's greatest historians of China, Paul Cohen, recently wrote an exceptional, twenty-one-page appreciation of Hessler in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, lauding this empathy:

He observes, he describes, he explains, but, although occasionally dismayed at the behavior of individual Chinese, he almost never is judgmental about the Chinese collectively. On the contrary, his



Peter Hessler with the Huangs, a local fishing family described in his 2003 *New Yorker* essay 'Underwater,' on the rising waters of the Yangtze River shortly after the gates of the Three Gorges Dam were closed, Wushan, China, June 2003

broad view that daily politics rarely enter his work. He talked largely about working in Egypt—the importance of Cairo versus the relative unimportance of Beijing, for example, or why the Egyptian revolution failed. When China came up, he spoke in fairly optimistic terms that complimented his audience of young, white-collar workers. They nodded and applauded when he said they were a generation of individualists, with their own ideas and thoughts.

"When you talk to older people it is difficult because they don't like to talk about themselves," he said in response to a questioner. "But if you talk to young people, they're willing to tell their views. I don't know what the effect of this will be, but it'll have an impact."

One of Hessler's main points was the importance of being an observer. Many journalists interview their subjects, he said; his own aim was to watch and describe. Several people murmured approval. Later, I talked to a twenty-six-year-old computer programmer who told me that he didn't like the way China is portrayed in the foreign press. Waiting at the end of a two-hundred-person line for an autograph, he said of Hessler: "He doesn't judge. That's how I want to be."

capture the drama of its transformation. Twenty years ago, I joined a government-sponsored reporting trip to a remote, impoverished part of the country. A low-level official and I chatted for hours as our small bus wound through the mountains of Guizhou in south-central China, speeding through long tunnels and over suspension bridges. Why, he asked me, do foreign correspondents only write about the bridge that collapses and not the thousands of bridges that don't?

I thought he was joking, but as we talked I realized he meant it seriously: countless studies show that one of the best measures to alleviate poverty is building infrastructure, and here we were on a road that was something of a miracle to local people, allowing them to get their products to market, their children to schools, and themselves to jobs in the cities. China was in the midst of an unparalleled and largely successful attempt to reduce poverty, so why wouldn't we write about this, he asked. All I could do was stammer that good news is no news. Back in Beijing a few days later, I wrote a story about a girl who was so poor she lived in a pig stall. My editors loved it and readers pledged money, but I was often nagged by the feeling that this had been the easy story. More challenging to expect-

basic humanity enables him, consistently, to enter thoughtfully into the feelings and behavior of people who are different in just about every way from himself.²

In person, he is more pointed in arguing his ideas and stubborn in defending them. By 2000, at age thirty-one, he was writing regularly for *The New Yorker* but his articles were not his predominant concern. Instead, he pursued book projects and carved articles out of them for the magazine—as opposed to the usual practice of magazine writers who produce articles and cobble them together into books. For him, his larger understanding of China came first, the journalism second.

Hessler saw the story of China in the 1990s and 2000s as driven not by nationally known personalities or dramatic news events, but by an epochal movement of hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, and out of the village life that had dominated Chinese civilization. It was the rise of individuals—people with their own aspirations and goals, which they pursued in the space granted by the post-Mao state. Hessler lived in China while people like future Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo were publicly active, but he never wrote about them. To him, they might be noble but were marginal. That they were persecuted proved the state's

²Peter Hessler: Teacher, Archaeologist, Anthropologist, Travel Writer, Master Storyteller, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 72, No. 2 (May 2013).

paranoia, not their larger significance for China's future.

During his tour, I had the chance to talk to him at some length, and he emphasized to me that he isn't allergic to politics. In Egypt, he has written extensively about the Muslim Brotherhood and attended former president Mohamed Morsi's trial. In China his books include an in-depth look at the Party's operation in a village and sensitive issues such as hiring underage workers.

But in China, he said, he felt that elite politics are less important, especially when they revolve around classic dissidents challenging the state. During his eleven years in China, Hessler said he had been entrenched in a community three times—the teachers college (two years), a village (seven years), and a company town (three years)—and could follow events there longitudinally. In each place, the same pattern emerged: the most talented people either were recruited by the Party or quietly disengaged from it. The only people who actually fought the Party were “poorly connected and often dysfunctional”—petitioners, for example, or other marginal figures. Many were interesting and he wrote about them in depth, but they were not driving events.

“This is why I think it's a big mistake to focus too much on the high-profile and truly remarkable dissidents,” Hessler told me. “It gives the American reader the impression that the really smart people in China are opposed to the Party.”

These strongly held ideas underpin his books. Many journalists in China have been turned off—I often heard

them say they wished he would finally tackle a “real” topic rather than his allegorical tales from small towns. But readers seem to find something of value. According to royalty statements at the end of last June, Hessler's four books have sold 385,000 copies in the US, a figure that easily makes him the most influential popular writer on China in decades.

Many readers realize intuitively that if China were a country primarily defined by the troubles reported in the media, it would be a basket case. Yet this doesn't match the rising power they know from their shopping malls or workplaces. Hessler's portraits help explain a rising China, and do so through gentle and often optimistic stories that parallel myths familiar to Americans—Horatio Alger-type tales of people on the move.

Not too long after he became a fixture in *The New Yorker*, Hessler's stories began attracting Chinese readers, too, thanks to the Chinese translation website *Yeeyan* (www.yeeyan.org). Readers were stunned that a foreigner was interested in ordinary people. China has little tradition of narrative nonfiction. The few books that deal with daily life, such as the sociologist Liang Hong's study of her home village, *Liang Village in China*, have sold well, but they are rare and most are poorly written.

People began buying Chinese editions of Hessler's books published in Taiwan. Chatrooms began filling up with reports of his doings. By the time his books began to be published in China in 2010, he was a full-blown celebrity, eclipsing any other foreign writer on China. His only book not to be translated is *Oracle Bones*, a wide-ranging work that includes the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, the crushing of the Falungong spiritual movement, and ethnic tensions. Hessler's Chinese editor told me that these topics made the book too political to pass censorship so the publishing house hasn't tried. Still, Hessler has sold 500,000 books in China in just four years.

But this puts Hessler at the center of a vexing and heated discussion: How should Western writers deal with censorship? Writing on contemporary China and publishing there almost inevitably mean accepting government cuts. Is this acceptable if a writer is trying to achieve what he takes to be the larger aim of portraying a little-known reality?

The issue has been widely debated in the West over the past year, with *The New York Times* publishing a major feature on the topic.³ Then, in May, Hessler's successor as *The New Yorker's* correspondent in China, Evan Osnos, published an Op-Ed in the *Times* about his decision not to publish his new book, *Age of Ambition*, in China—which recently won the National Book Award for nonfiction—because a prospective Chinese publisher told him that about a quarter of the book would have to be cut or modified.⁴ This isn't surprising

because Osnos's book deals explicitly with contemporary politics and portrays well-known dissidents, such as the artist Ai Weiwei and the blind lawyer Chen Guangcheng. Probably no author would consent to such wholesale cuts. But in his Op-Ed, Osnos argued that even minor cuts are unacceptable because they give Chinese a false sense of what the world thinks of them and their political system:

It is tempting to accept censorship as a matter of the margins—a pruning that leaves the core of the story intact—but altering the proportions of a portrait of China gives a false reflection of how China appears to the world at a moment when it is making fundamental choices about what kind of country it will become.

Recently, the well-known Chinese historian Joseph Esherick joined the debate, taking the opposite tack. In an essay on the *ChinaFile* website, Esherick explained how censors demanded significant changes to his recent book about a famous family in Chinese history. He described how he successfully argued with them on some points, but in the end agreed to cuts and alterations. The reason, he wrote, is because he believes that change in China will happen by “continuing a dialogue with Chinese colleagues, engaging the censors, and pushing the envelope to its greatest possible extent.”⁵ Hessler joined the debate himself in *The New Yorker* (“Travels with my Censor,” March 9, 2015), portraying book censorship in China as much lighter than many outsiders expect, and carried out by people who are often eager to circumvent restrictions.

Like Esherick, Hessler agreed to trims. *River Town* seems to have suffered the least, with just a few references to Deng Xiaoping and the handover of Hong Kong in 1997 excised. I wondered, however, what the censors made of his most politically sensitive essay, a seventeen-page piece in the essay collection *Strange Stones* about the Party leadership's retreat at the seaside resort of Beidaihe.

I found that a half-dozen sentences had been cut in the Chinese edition, such as this one: “Communist China had never had an orderly succession—for half a century, every transfer of power had involved coups or power struggles.” I also found many smaller examples of the translator smoothing over phrases that might offend censors, substituting the word “location” for “battleground” in referring to the meeting at Beidaihe, or “chaos” instead of “crackdown” to describe the 1989 Tiananmen massacre.

Hessler has recently put up a website (www.peterhessler.net) with a Chinese-language page that lists the major cuts. He also got his Chinese publisher to include a short note at the start of new editions of his books directing them to this site. To date, the site has all the major cut passages from his three books published in China, but not the smaller word changes.

How significant are these edits? The published account of the Beidaihe conclave loses the tension that Hessler

³See Andrew Jacobs, “Authors Accept Censors' Rules to Sell in China,” *The New York Times*, October 19, 2013.

⁴See Evan Osnos, “China's Censored World,” *The New York Times*, May 2, 2014. Osnos's book was reviewed in these pages by Perry Link, August 14, 2014.

⁵See Joseph Esherick, “On Dealing with Chinese Censors,” *ChinaFile*, October 14, 2014.

HIRAM BUTLER GALLERY



James Turrell
Meeting, 1989-90,
Aquatint, 42 7/16 x 29 13/16", Ed. 30
hrambutler.com

originally intended when he portrayed it as a showdown between outgoing Communist Party boss Jiang Zemin and his successor, Hu Jintao. The sharp sentences making this point are expunged, blurring what was already an impressionistic essay. If Chinese readers were to think that this is all the West's most influential writer on their country has to say on the subject, they would be misled.

And yet the essay was probably intended not as a comprehensive account of leadership conclaves, but as a look at how ordinary people perceive elite politics. Hessler writes about arriving in Beidaihe and checking into a sanatorium, where most residents are old workers—the sort of people being crowded out of today's Chinese society. He describes being followed by secret police, and talking to the old workers who know he's being followed. They laugh at the cops, implicitly showing their solidarity with him. All of this is in the Chinese edition, with no changes. It's not Hessler's full account, but it's still revealing of Chinese life in Hessler's distinctive way. Is that good enough?

3.

These debates swirled through my head as I browsed the shelves of a bookstore in Beijing called One Way Street Space. It occupies part of a former government think tank, a three-story structure from the 1950s made of brick and covered in vines. The owners gutted the inside to expose the brick and concrete skeleton, and gave

it a sleek finish of parquet floors, white bookcases, and spot lighting. I found titles that had been much discussed in China, such as *The Dictator's Handbook* by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Paul Fussell's *Class*, but wondered what was between the covers.

This September, for six hours, One Way Street was given over to Hesslermania. In the afternoon, a dozen journalists badgered him for two hours on a strange variety of topics, from his views on genetically modified crops (he has no opinion) to whether his humorous story about a restaurant where rat was served was meant to show China in a bad light (it wasn't—it was just a funny story he had sent his mentor, the author John McPhee, who recommended it to *The New Yorker*) and how his children are doing (fine). No one asked him what political ideas underlay his writings—why he didn't write about dissidents, for example. When I asked the journalists about this later, they gave me the stock answer that Hessler was just an observer, faithfully recording what he saw.

But the journalists were asking other questions as well. Most dealt with writing: what writers he was reading, how to use different voices, and to what extent true objectivity is possible. In one way, it was an odd exercise because none of the journalists later published stories on this question—most did fairly standard stories about the famous writer coming to town. It almost seemed sad—here they were, hoping to write great nonfiction, but would they have the chance? Still, it's also true that technical questions can lead to broader lessons. I thought

of a friend who recently lectured in a class run by a Chinese photographer famous for his pictures of pollution, but also known in photography circles for posing his subjects. He had told his students that this was okay, and so the students were stunned when the visitor said it was not—documenting reality requires a code of ethics. It isn't substituting one form of propaganda for another.

After the press conference and a hasty dinner, Hessler gave his familiar talk, in Chinese, to about one hundred readers crammed into the bookstore's second-floor lecture hall. He described scenes from his childhood, when he got to know a friend of the family, the Chinese-American sociologist Peter Kong-Ming New. Hessler was named after the older man, and said he learned much of the craft of observation from him. The man also seemed extraordinarily tall and talkative.

"I grew up thinking Chinese were giants who liked to tell stories," Hessler said to much laughter.

It was a shrewd topic because it made Hessler into a Westerner influenced by a Chinese scholar—a welcome reversal of roles for many who feel they are constantly being told to learn from the West, only to be lectured that they haven't learned enough. It also reinforced the assertion that Hessler's Chinese publishers promote: that at heart he is a social scientist looking at China, an objective observer with no agenda. I'd heard this from many readers, who seemed convinced that they were dealing with a scholar comparable, say, to Talcott Parsons, the prominent Harvard sociologist.

The event ended and people lined up to get their books signed. Besides Hessler, I seemed to be the only other visible foreigner in the room and people soon surrounded me.

"He worked for you at *The Wall Street Journal*? What was he like? Tell us a story."

I asked why they read him. After all, they must know China better than a Missourian.

"He shows us a familiar country, but one we never saw before," said one young man, a twenty-five-year-old engineer named Brian Cheung. "He cares about the lives of ordinary people."

A tall young man of twenty-nine stood in the background. When the crowd thinned out, he stepped forward and identified himself as an English teacher at a local university.

"I'd like to hear more from him about politics. I feel we need to know more about Liu Xiaobo and Charter 08," he said of the imprisoned dissident and his manifesto for political change.

"But if his books were about that he wouldn't be here promoting his books," I said. "Those kinds of books can't be published here."

"I know, I know." The young man said. "But I still want to know about that too."

"And yet you're here."

"He notices things about China that make us think. He sees a slogan on the wall and describes it, just like that. No commentary. Just the slogan, and when it's told like that, it seems absurd, laughable, like Kundera's *The Joke*. And we think: What *are* those slogans doing there? They *are* absurd. And then you start to think: Why?" □

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Image: Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, Rafael Mijares, and Jorge Campuzano. Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Chapultepec, Mexico City. View from the main courtyard. 1964. Photograph by Armando Salas Portugal. Fundación Armando Salas Portugal

Pound: Genius, Confucian, Fascist & Crazy

Mark Ford

Ezra Pound: Poet:
A Portrait of the Man and His Work,
Volume II: The Epic Years,
1921–1939

by A. David Moody.
Oxford University Press,
421 pp., \$35.00

Ezra Pound's only meeting with his great hero Benito Mussolini took place at 5:30 on the evening of Monday, January 30, 1933. Mussolini's imposing "office" was the vast Sala del Mappamondo (sixty feet long, forty feet wide, forty feet high) on the first floor of the Palazzo di Venezia in Rome. Il Duce, or Capo del Governo as Pound liked to call him, worked in rigorously enforced silence at a desk, on which he kept a grenade, at the far end of this otherwise empty room. Il Poeta brought with him two items in which he hoped to interest Italy's supreme leader: one was the deluxe Hours Press edition of *A Draft of XXX Cantos* (published in 1930 by the enterprising and wealthy Nancy Cunard in an edition of 212 copies); the other was a handwritten list of eighteen policy ideas that he wanted Mussolini to adopt.

We have only Pound's account in various letters, conversations, and Canto XLI of what took place at this meeting. Pound later told his daughter Mary de Rachewiltz that Mussolini "went poking around" in the book until he came across a characteristic specimen of Pound's mimicry in Canto XVI: "Looka vat youah Trotzsk is done, e iss madeh deh zhamefull beace!!" "But this is not English," exclaimed Il Duce, who was learning the language at the time. "No," explained Pound, "it's my idea of how a Continental Jew would speak English." Mussolini seems to have found the idea of a poem including this sort of irreverent knockabout most "*divertente*"—entertaining.

He appears, however, to have been less amused by Pound's eighteen-point economic plan, a key element of which was the abolition of taxes: "Ugh, these aren't things to answer straight off the bat. No, this one about taxes... Ungh!... Have to think about THAT." Still, however dubious, he told Pound to get his economic suggestions typed up, and asked him to stay on in Rome in case he deemed a further exchange of views useful. Pound, never a shrinking violet, clearly badgered the Capo's private secretary about this second appointment, but no summons came. The C.G. had more pressing issues than the cranky economic ideas of an American poet to attend to: some five hours before this one and only meeting between Il Poeta and Il Duce, Adolf Hitler had been appointed chancellor of Germany.

Mussolini had come to power some eleven years earlier, after marching his forces on Rome, and there declaring, with the blessing of the king, the birth of the Fascist new order. Nineteen-twenty-two was a big year for Pound's literary revolutionaries too: Joyce's *Ulysses* was finally published in Paris on February 2, and almost exactly a month earlier T.S. Eliot had stopped off at Pound's Paris apartment on his way back from Lausanne to London, leaving his friend with the manuscript of a long, sprawling poem out of which



Ezra Pound, Vienna, 1928; photograph by Bill Brandt

il miglior fabbro, as the poem's dedication styles him, quarried *The Waste Land*, which was published in *The Criterion* and *The Dial* later that year.

Ulysses was issued in a limited and expensive edition by Sylvia Beach, founder of Shakespeare & Co., and would soon run into all manner of censorship issues; nevertheless Pound saw Joyce's completion of his "*roman réaliste par excellence*" as initiating a new era, and took to dating letters according to a calendar starting on midnight October 29–30, 1921, the moment Joyce wrote Molly Bloom's final "Yes." Year 1 p.s.U. = the year post scriptum *Ulysses*. In due course, however, Mussolini's feats would eclipse in Pound's eyes those of the Irish writer, and Pound would adopt the Italian Fascist calendar rather than his own literary modernist one.

The Epic Years is the subtitle A. David Moody applies to the middle period of Pound's career: Pound famously defined an epic poem as a poem including history, and his switch to a calendar commemorating the seizure of power by Mussolini from one commemorating the completion of *Ulysses* can be read as a small instance of his increasing engagement with the historical events of his time during this period, and of his developing sense of himself as an epic hero who could save Western civilization, if only those currently in charge of it could be made to listen. "Ungh!"—Mussolini's noncommittal grunt when confronted with Pound's economic blueprint for a happy Fascist future—was also roughly the response

of the various American senators and congressmen whom Pound bombarded with letters and instructions, and even, in a quixotic bid to shape his native country's foreign and domestic policies along Poundian lines, berated in person on a visit to Capitol Hill in 1939.

Writing *The Cantos*, which include lots and lots of history, mainly that of various Chinese dynasties and of the early American Republic, formed only one element in Pound's overall mission; he deemed it also imperative to make Mussolini and America's benighted lawgivers pay heed to his views, and change tack accordingly. Sometimes "epic" does seem the right word for the obsessional and eventually disastrous behavior of Pound in these years, and it certainly does justice to his own unquestioning belief in his world-saving acumen and powers; but at other times mock-epic, or even farcical, seems nearer the mark.

Volume I of Moody's projected trilogy recounted Pound's years as an *enfant terrible* in London. While Eliot, in his possum-like way (this telling sobriquet came from Pound), set about ingratiating himself with the literary and social aristocracy in whose ranks he sought, and fairly quickly achieved, both eminence and power, Pound played the part of the Bohemian wild poet. His disgust with the pusillanimous hidebound literary scene he had hoped to mobilize and infuse with Poundian energy and principles is the dominant tone of his "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" of 1920, a poem he described as his "farewell" to the city he was casting off, a city that actually hadn't treated him at all badly.

Bill Brandt Archives

He and his English wife Dorothy (whose mother was Olivia Shakespear, once a lover of Yeats's) settled in Paris on rue des Saints-Pères in April 1921. This volume opens with modernism's *sage-homme* (male midwife—he uses the term of himself in a letter to Eliot of January 1922) presiding over the births of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, but wondering about his own contributions to the movement. "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," though much praised by the normally rather stern F.R. Leavis, is in fact a bit of a mess, and drafts of early cantos begun in London as far back as 1915 were still in a state of flux and uncertainty.

The poem that became the wonderful Canto II was the first fruit of his two-year residence in Paris. While a collage from various sources, its center is a version of Acoetes's account in Book III of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* of Dionysos or Bacchus in action. The boy-god, having been captured on the isle of Chios by sailors who intend to sell him into slavery, halts their boat mid-sea: their oars and sails become overgrown with ivy ("grape-leaves on the rowlocks") and the sailors transformed into dolphins ("Fish scales over groin muscles"). A mirage of prowling lynxes, panthers, and leopards crowd around Dionysos, as Acoetes records:

out of nothing, a breathing
hot breath on my
ankles,
Beasts like shadows in glass...
fur brushing my
knee-skin,
Rustle of airy sheaths,
dry forms in the
aether

The god's effortless victory over his enemies serves almost as an allegory of the triumphant artistic revolution that was Pound's ideal; as Dionysos and his followers defeated all who defied them, so Pound and his intrepid band of modernistas would overcome their opponents, the blinkered guardians of the status quo. Pound liked to think of himself as a Dionysian figure, a liberator—"IO ZAGREUS!" he exclaims in Canto XVII, Zagreus being a Greek God often identified with Dionysos. And like Zagreus or Dionysos, Pound certainly felt himself able to transform whatever he touched: poetry, music, economics, history, the work and minds of his fellow artists, the policies of Mussolini, or of Franklin D. Roosevelt, if only the recalcitrant president would come to his senses and agree to see him.

If one strips away from this can-do philosophy the mythical terms and parallels, Pound can often seem like a classic, if extreme, example of the Emersonian ideal of self-reliance. Why be deterred by lack of musical training from writing an opera or two, or indeed from developing a wholly "new theory of harmony"? Though not a carpenter by trade, why not make your own furniture, as Pound did for their apartment on rue des Saints-Pères? (In the oft-reproduced photograph of Joyce, Pound, Ford Madox Ford, and the law-

yer and patron of the arts John Quinn taken there in 1923, Ford perches gingerly, but Quinn rather regally, on Pound's creations, while Joyce, who possibly had first pick of the seating, slouches in an easy chair.)

The history of China is a dauntingly complex topic, particularly for someone with only a limited knowledge of the language; but with the purchase of a thirteen-volume French *Histoire de Chine* published toward the end of the eighteenth century, Pound felt fully equipped to convert centuries of Chinese history into an accurate and illuminating poetic narrative (Cantos LII–LXI) that illustrates modes of good and bad government.

The thing to discover was the *paideuma*, a term he borrowed from the German anthropologist Leo Frobenius, which Pound understood to mean “the active element in the era, the complex of ideas which is in a given time germinal...conditioning actively all the thought and action.” This *paideuma* will be most fully active and observable in the works and deeds of the era's geniuses, and hence, in *Jefferson and/or Mussolini* (1935), Pound set about exploring how these two, on the face of it, somewhat antithetical figures could be seen as similar embodiments of *will* or *volition*, and as heroic opponents of the great canker of usury that, in Pound's view, threatened every aspect of meaningful life:

*Usura slayeth the child in the womb
It stayeth the young man's courting
It hath brought palsey to bed,
lyeth
between the young bride and her
bridegroom*
CONTRA NATURAM

The self-reliant genius will both know exactly what nature is and the sorts of social and political and economic arrangements that are *not* CONTRA NATURAM. Pound often suggests, too, that the best means of understanding the *paideuma* of a culture is through choice sampling—or skim-reading, as his doubters might put it—rather than thorough immersion. “Really,” he observed in a letter of 1916 to Iris Barry, “one DON'T need to know a language. One NEEDS, damn well needs, to know the few hundred words in the few really good poems that any language has in it.”

Of course the doctrine of self-reliance maps onto democracy rather than authoritarianism, and indeed might be said to underpin laissez-faire capitalism, which Pound detested, even to act as ideological whitewash to its robber-baron predations. Certainly there was nothing laissez-faire about Pound; Moody is at pains to show the earnest ingenuity he brought to the task of squaring his vision of an ideal America, predicated largely on his interpretations of the lives and writings of Jefferson and John Adams, with his admiration for Mussolini's post-democratic imposition of order on a chaotic Italy—the draining of malarial swamps and getting the trains to run on time.

Pound's pro-Mussolini views in the late 1920s and 1930s are shown by Moody to be not particularly out of kilter with a spectrum of opinion widely voiced in both America and the rest of Europe, although a number of fellow poets, such as Louis Zukofsky and Basil

Bunting and William Carlos Williams, would have no truck with the direction taken by Pound's politics. “It makes me sick to see you covering yourself with that kind of filth,” wrote Bunting in December 1938, having read a letter of Pound's to Zukofsky (who was Jewish) in defense of Hitler: “Why curse Adolphe/,” Pound had aggressively demanded, “why not git down to bedrock/ NESCHEK [Hebrew for usury] and the bugging vendetta of the shitten Rothschild which has run for 150 years/and is now flopping back on Jewry at large.” Such crass and poisonous prejudice, Bunting declared, made Pound into “an enemy of mankind at large.”

Moody is an astute and superbly thorough guide to Pound's views, behavior, and writings. Unlike Humphrey Carpenter, whose highly readable *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* was published in 1988, Moody includes long and searching discussions of particular cantos. Pound's life, from his birth in Hailey, Idaho, in 1885 to his death in Venice in 1972, makes for such hair-raising and entertaining copy at almost every stage that there is a strong temptation to skip on analysis of the often rebarbative poetry that he wrote, in favor of a narrative that captures the controversy and craziness, the sheer drama of his story, his “incredible journey”—to borrow a phrase popular with reality TV show contestants. If Moody is, on the whole, somewhat less racy and enthralling than Carpenter, that is because he seeks to do scholarly justice to the work as well as giving us a richly detailed portrait of the man.

While firm in his condemnation of Pound's anti-Semitism, which would erupt most spectacularly in the wartime broadcasts that he made in Rome (and so will be covered in the next volume), Moody views Pound with a sympathy only occasionally tinged with exasperation. The poet's vitriolic attacks on the banking system, he notes in his preface, have a particular resonance for twenty-first-century readers; and however unworkable the solutions Pound offered, his volcanic anger at the pain caused to ordinary men and women during the Depression by the greed and malfeasance of financial institutions allows us, Moody contends, to see the raging poet as a “flawed idealist” whose quest to bring about more equitable systems of government was, at bottom, principled and decent, however tarnished by anti-Semitism.

Increasingly in the years covered by this book Pound turned to Confucius as a source for models of good governance, attracted especially by the emphasis in *Ta Hio* on the crucial part played by “precise verbal definition” in the processes of self-discipline that formed the basis of Confucian ideas of order. “Having attained this precise verbal definition,” to quote from Pound's own translation, Confucian adepts “stabilized their hearts”:

Having attained self-discipline, they set their own houses in order; having order in their own homes, they brought good government to their own states; and when their states were well governed, the empire was brought into equilibrium.

At the root of this holistic vision lay exactly the ideal of linguistic precision

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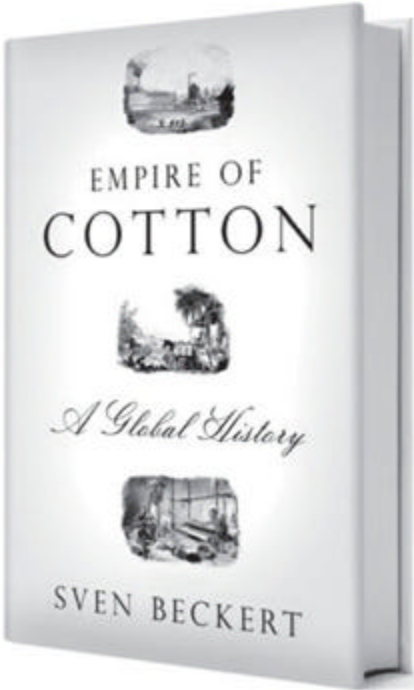
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**“Masterly...
An astonishing
achievement...”**
Gives new insight into
the relentless expansion
of global capitalism.”
—*The New York Times*

**“Illuminating,
memorable...”**
Should be devoured
eagerly, not only by
scholars and students but
also by the intelligent
reading public.”
—*The Washington Post*

KNOPF 

Pound had formulated back in the days of Imagism—"direct treatment of the thing"; further, it offered a means of unifying the concept of individual responsibility with the imperatives of imposing good government upon the state, allowing a fusion of the Jeffersonian with the strong-arm tactics of Mussolini. When Italy invaded Abyssinia in 1935, Pound saw it as a benign expansion of the Capo's self-governance: "The boss knows his business," he insisted to his worried father, while reassuring US Senator William A. Borah that "you can have perfectly clear conscience that 7 million of subjected population in Abyssinia will be benefitted by conquest."

In the light of the importance placed by Confucius on the happily ordered family unit in the sequence of virtuous circles arising from a stable heart and linguistically precise self-discipline, Moody can't help wondering if Pound ever brooded on his own highly un-Confucian domestic arrangements. Pound embarked on what would become a forty-nine-year relationship with the Ohio-born violinist Olga Rudge in Paris in the summer of 1923, while Dorothy was in London caring for her recently widowed mother.

The steely Olga determined fairly rapidly that Pound would be the father of her child, rejoicing in her diary at having "*piantato un figlio*" in November 1924. The *figlio* turned out to be a daughter, Mary, who was born in the Tyrol in July 1925. On her own admission, however, Olga was by no means a maternal type, "having no talent that way," refusing to breast-feed, and urging Pound to hurry if he wanted to see the "*leoncina*" alive since "it will probably not live—there is very little left of it." Olga's next missive, of July 22, recorded a lucky break for the little lioness: "There is a *contadina* [farm woman] here whose child has died—who can nurse it a few weeks at least... I think it will go if it only gets a start—it looks very grim and determined." By the time Pound eventually arrived, Mary's determination had pulled her through, and she was quickly consigned on a permanent basis to the care of the *contadina* and her husband, Herr and Frau Marcher, freeing her progenitors to pursue their artistic careers, and their affair, untrammelled by parental responsibility.

How much did Dorothy know? How much did she mind? Moody suggests quite a lot, and that it was desire for revenge that drove her to sail from Genoa to Cairo some five months after the birth of Mary. Although she had made it clear that she never wanted a child, she returned from this trip pregnant; the father, identified by Moody in the text only as R, was Egyptian, as was surely signaled by the first name bestowed on the infant, Omar, on his birth in Paris on September 10, 1926. A footnote alerts us to a letter received by Dorothy in January 1939 from an Egyptian army officer called Captain E. Hassan Riffai containing some stamps for Omar's stamp collection, making him the most likely candidate.

It was Hemingway rather than her husband who took Dorothy to the hospital when her time came, but Pound who declared himself the boy's father on the birth certificate. In a terse note to his own father, Pound broke the

happy news that Homer and Isabel were now grandparents (they didn't know about Mary at this point): "Dear Dad | next generation (male) arrived. | Both D & it appear to be doing well. | Ford going to U.S. to lecture in October. | Have told him you wd. probably be glad to put him up. | more anon, | yrs | E." They would not discover that Pound was not in fact Omar's biological father until 1939.

Dorothy quickly showed herself to be no more ready than Olga to assume the role of a hands-on mother. Omar was deposited first with a nurse in Paris, and then at the age of nine months placed in the Norland Institute and Nurseries in Kensington. How much vindictive triumph, one wonders, is there in Dorothy's remark in a letter to Pound from London written shortly after her

Olga bought a small house in Venice in 1928, to which she lured Pound as often as she could; not content, however, with these sporadic visits, two years later she arranged to rent an apartment just above Rapallo itself, forcing Pound's juggling act to become ever more complex—especially since the year before his retired parents had moved to Rapallo too. The ever-supportive Homer was let in on the secret of Mary's existence, and even visited her in Gais in 1930, while the more conventional Isabel preferred to avert her eyes from the shame of an illegitimate granddaughter.

Meanwhile, as well as thousands of letters per year, and numerous forcefully, if idiosyncratically, argued prose texts such as *How to Read* (1931), *ABC*

quaintance, reveal a fugue-like structuring of their borrowed elements.

That may well be so, and of course there is always what Bunting called *le refrain joyeux et leger*, the moment of lyricism and transparency, to look out for, however fugitive, or drowned out by the scraping of ice on rock. Moody himself characterizes the staccato mode in which Pound delivers the series of facts that he unearthed about the fifteenth-century mercenary Sigismondo Malatesta in the Malatesta cantos (VII–XI) as "one damned thing after another"; line after line begins "And"—"And the Angevins were gunning after Naples/And we dragged in the Angevins/And we dragged in Louis Eleventh," etc.

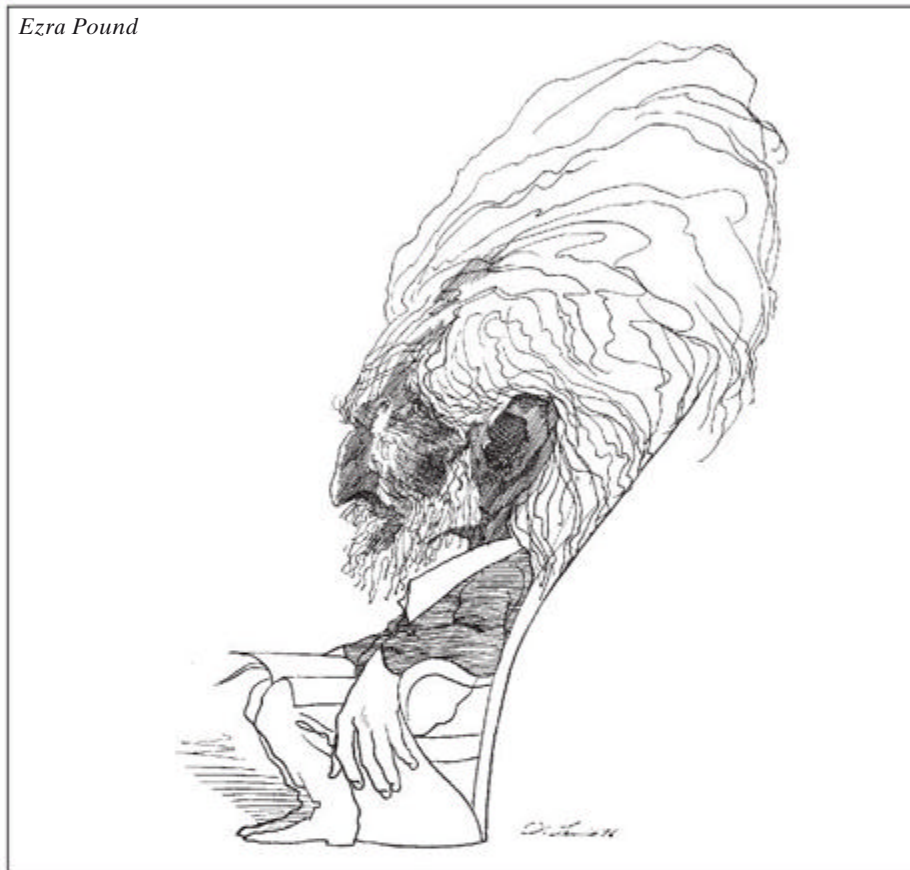
The *refrain joyeux* that suddenly reminds us that we are not reading notes for a history essay but a poem emerges quite unexpectedly toward the end of the sequence—"In the gloom, the gold gathers the light against it." Geoffrey Hill, like Pound a great champion of embattled contrarians, used this line as an epigraph for his *Collected Poems* of 1985. For those not professionally employed in decoding *The Cantos*, but reading them for pleasure, such moments come to seem like a heaven-sent reward for the persistence needed to scale these Alps.

Nevertheless Pound was surely right to think that he had more chance of shaping the historical events of his day by personally approaching those in power than through the examples of good and bad governance that he gathered and collated in his mid-thirties cantos; his poetic celebrations of Confucian wisdom were not, it had to be acknowledged, likely to have a decisive part in keeping America out of the war that now looked inevitable in Europe.

Hence the visit to his home country in April 1939, with which this volume closes. To all and sundry, and despite Hitler's recent invasion of Czechoslovakia, Pound depicted the looming hostilities as engineered for profit by "gun-touts and loan-sharks." He freely distributed his pamphlet *What Is Money For?*, published that month by the British Union of Fascists. While the ostensible reason for his visit was to receive an honorary doctorate from his alma mater, Hamilton College, his first stop was Washington, where an old friend found him "wandering blindly around the administration buildings."

There he pursued politicians and influential "econ pros" as avidly as he'd tracked down London literati, reporting to Dorothy on a day's "catch" that included two senators and the secretary of agriculture, Henry Wallace. Although clearly as persistent as a modern-day lobbyist, Pound found little interest in the stamp scrip scheme that he was offering as a panacea for the country's ills. He garnered rather more attention at the honorary degree ceremony in Hamilton when he angrily interrupted a fellow speaker who happened to declare that "dictatorships shall die, but democracies shall live": "About bust the commencement by heckling a s.o.b. that was spouting twaddle," he reported proudly to Olga. His next visit to America would be in 1945, under arrest for treason, for having himself spouted twaddle, and much, much worse, in the notorious radio broadcasts that he would start delivering in Rome about a year after his return to an Italy already mobilizing for war with America's allies. □

Ezra Pound



son had been disposed of in this way: "Omar's eyes give the show away badly, heaven help us."

Moody is rather censorious of Dorothy's behavior in this imbroglio, depicting her as "the Fury [who] wore the mask of the perfect lady," cuckolding her husband "with premeditation and cool determination, and in a manner which rather violently contravened the principles and the prejudices of her class." Pound, on the other hand, is figured as the love triangle's hapless victim, as the erring but stoical hero who "would accept his fate without protest or self-pity, as if in a state of godlike detachment." This detachment he rigorously preserved: Omar met his legal father only once, or possibly twice, during his childhood and adolescence, spent mainly with a retired Norland nanny in Felpham, Sussex. Moody is surely justified in pointing out the disparity between Confucian precepts such as "To govern a state one must first bring order into one's family" and Pound's blithe indifference to his biological daughter and his legal son.

In 1925 Pound and Dorothy moved to Rapallo, a coastal town in northern Italy. It was from there he conducted his furious epistolary campaigns, and struggled to placate the two women warring, with comparable amounts of bitterness and anger, for his affections.

of *Economics* (1933), *ABC of Reading* (1934), *Social Credit: An Impact* (1935), *Polite Essays* (1937), and *Guide to Kulchur* (1938), there streamed from Pound's typewriter fresh installments of the long poem that Basil Bunting, another Rapallo resident, was to compare to the Alps in his brilliant little homage of 1949, "On the Fly-Leaf of Pound's Cantos":

*There are the Alps. What is there
to say about them?
They don't make sense. Fatal
glaciers, crags cranks climb,
jumbled boulder and weed,
pasture and boulder, scree,
et l'on entend, maybe, le refrain
joyeux et leger.
Who knows what the ice will
have scraped on the rock it is
smoothing?*

Even hard-core Poundians, such as Hugh Kenner and Donald Davie, have felt that not quite enough smoothing had been attempted in the "China Cantos"; Davie dismissed them as "pathological and sterile," an opinion that earns from Moody a sharp rebuke here. Moody's overall defense of the more boulder-strewn stretches of Pound's magnum opus is that he is "making music of history," and that even cantos that strike the reader initially as mere cut-and-paste jobs often, on deeper ac-

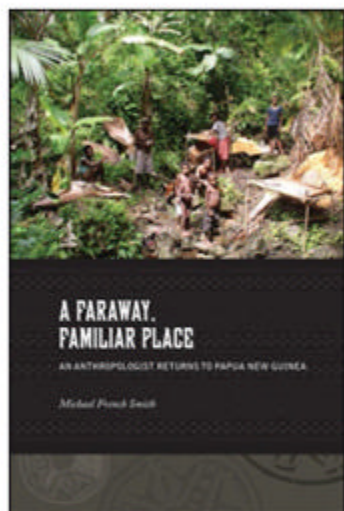
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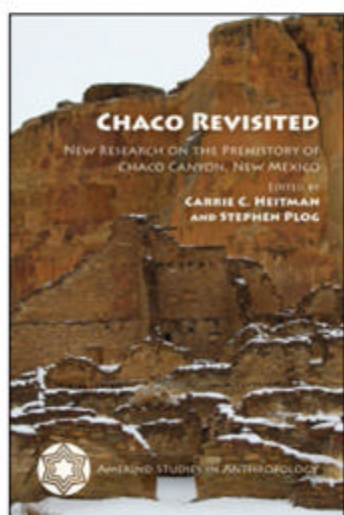
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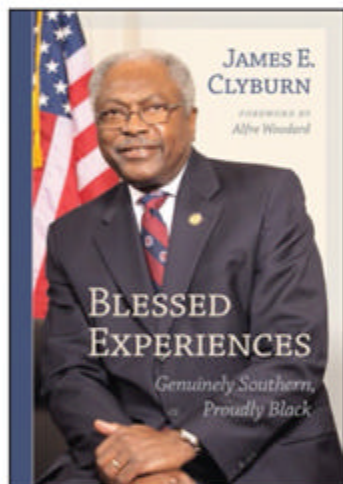
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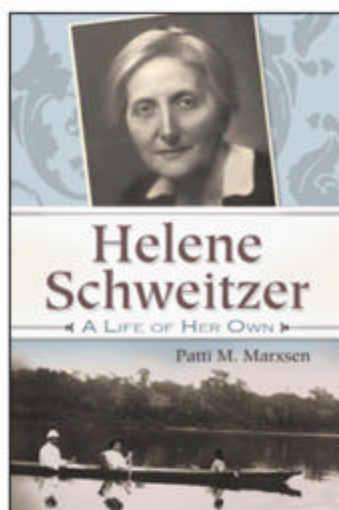
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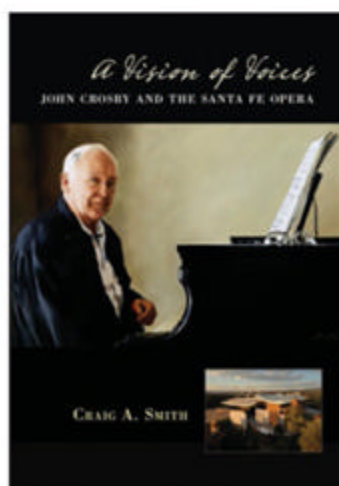
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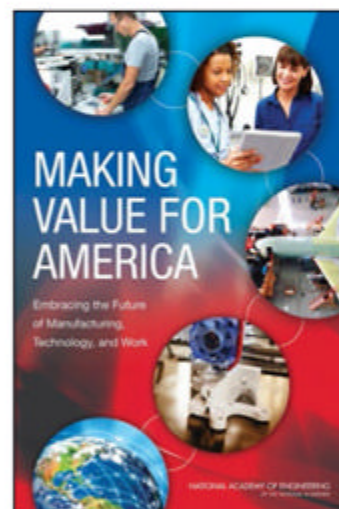
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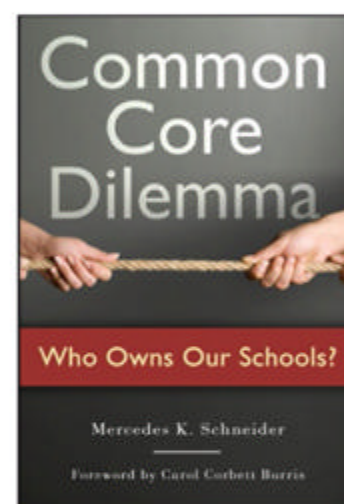


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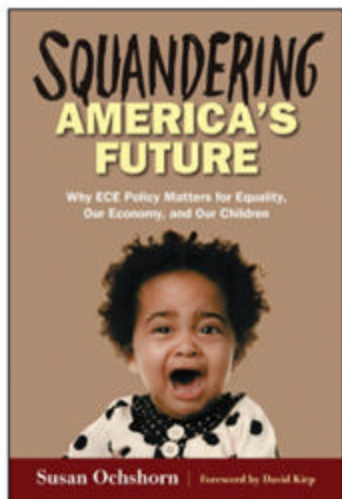
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EDUCATION



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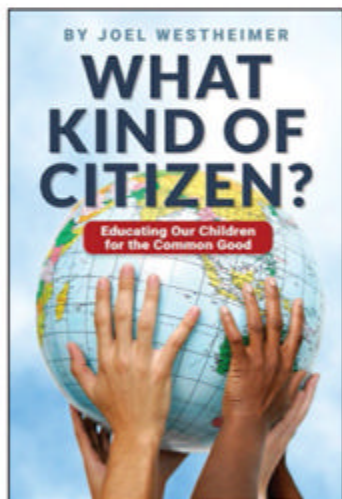
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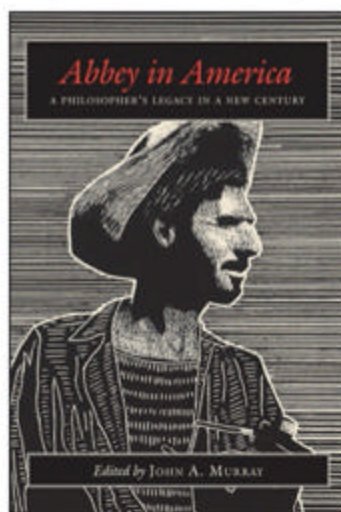


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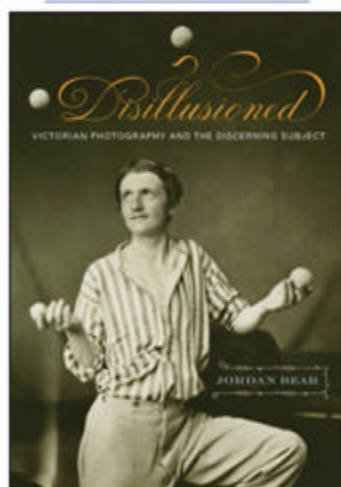


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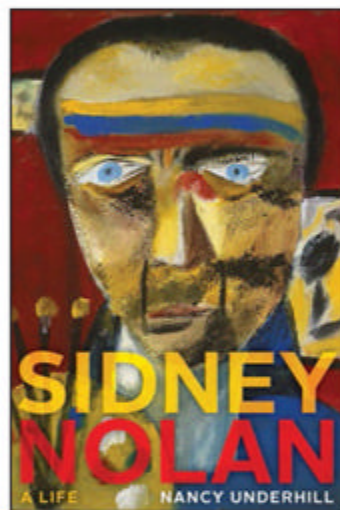
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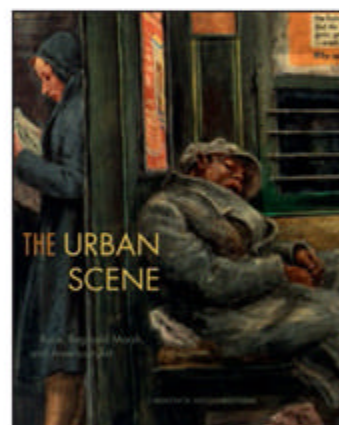
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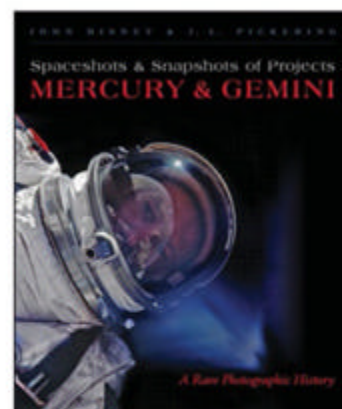
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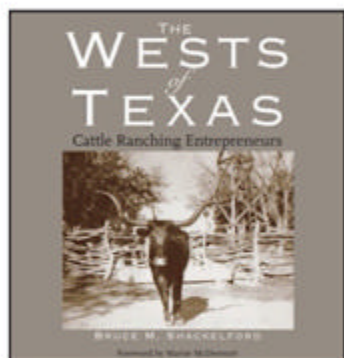


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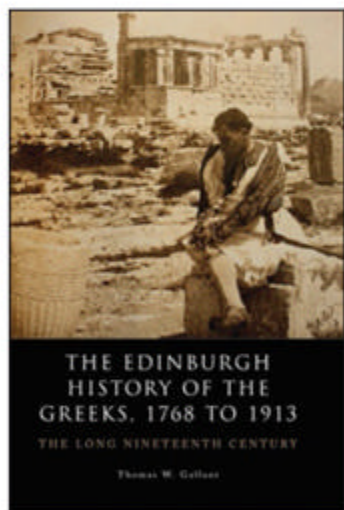
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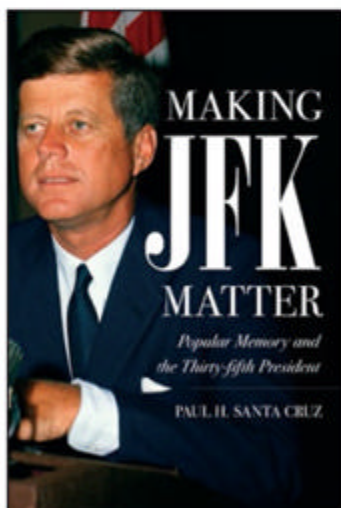
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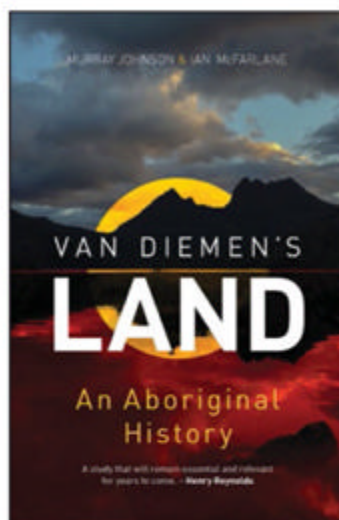
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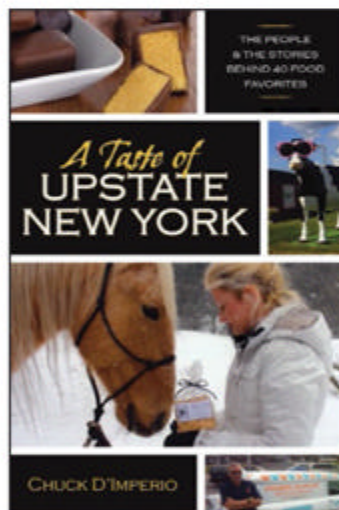
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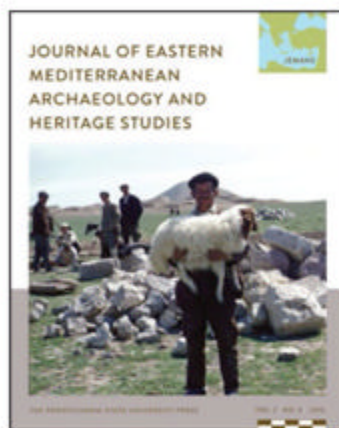


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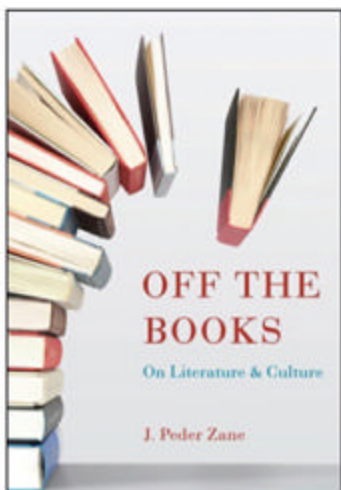
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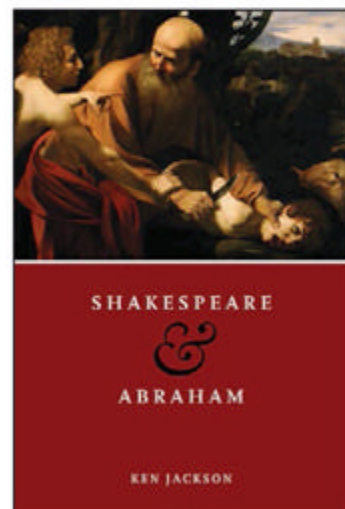
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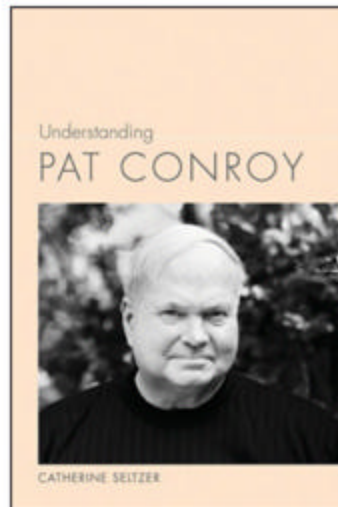
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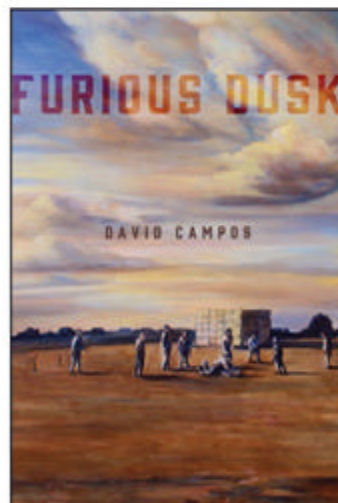
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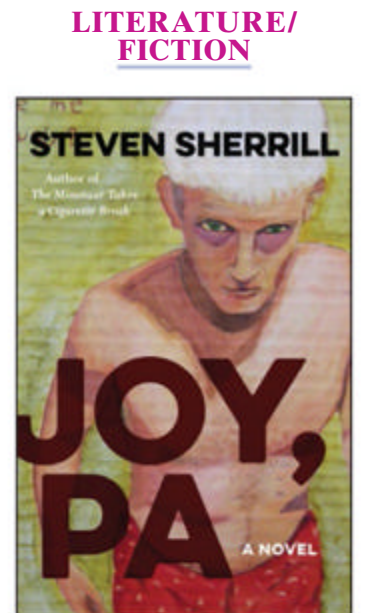
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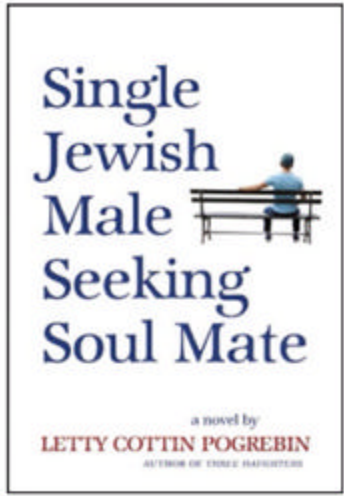
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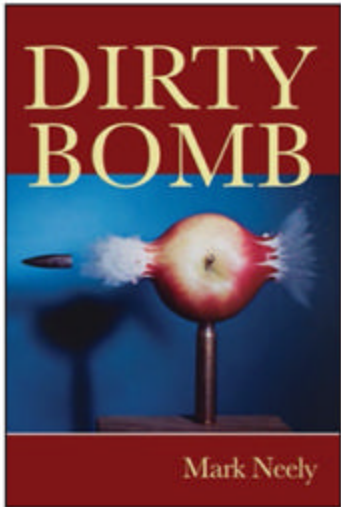
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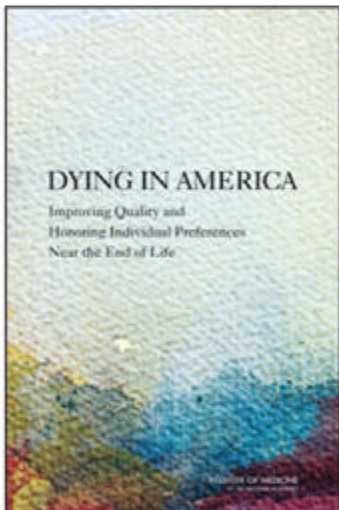
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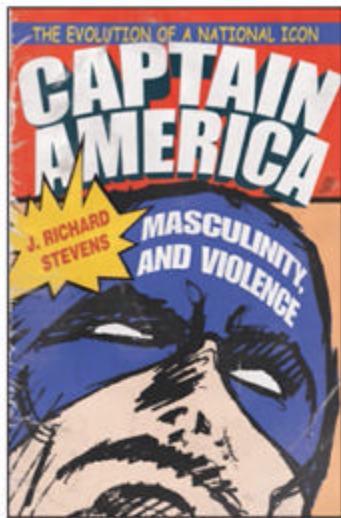
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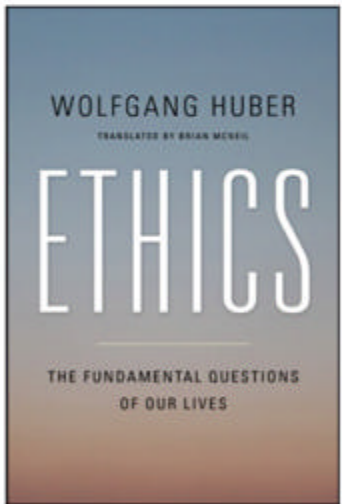
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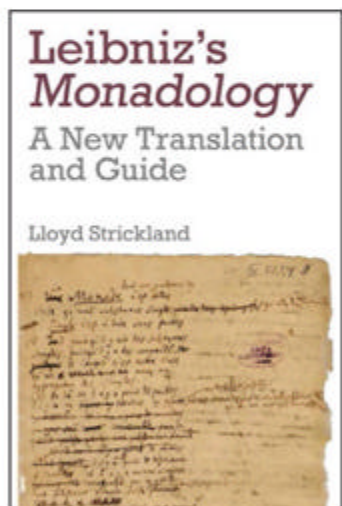
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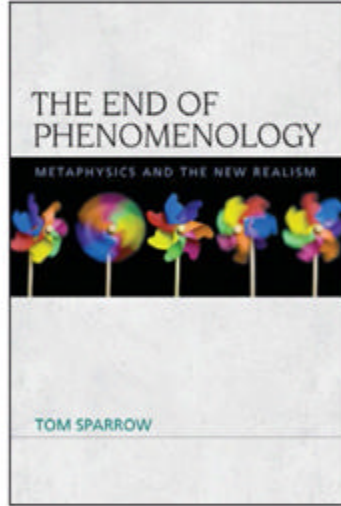
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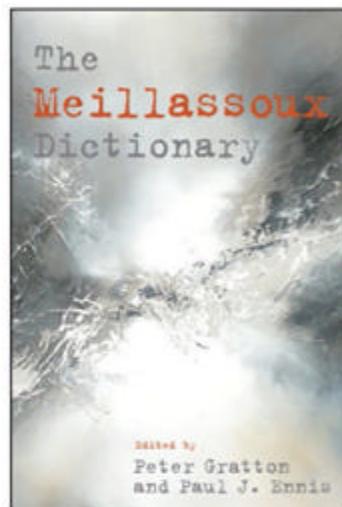
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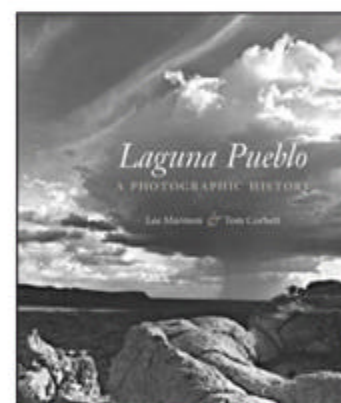
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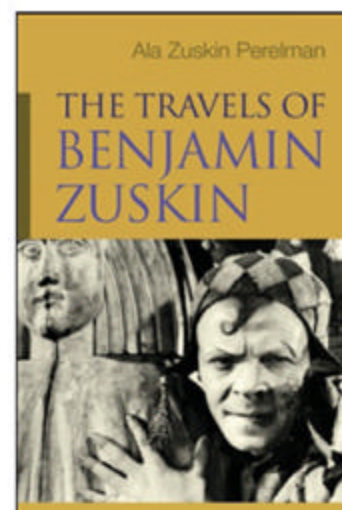
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The Angry New Frontier: Gay Rights vs. Religious Liberty

David Cole

1.

At the end of June, the Supreme Court will likely declare that the Constitution requires states to recognize same-sex marriages on the same terms that they recognize marriages between a man and a woman. If it does, the decision will mark a radical transformation in both constitutional law and public values. Twenty-five years ago, the very idea of same-sex marriage was unthinkable to most Americans; the notion that the Constitution somehow guaranteed the right to it was nothing short of delusional.

One sign of how far we have come is that the principal ground of political contention these days is not whether same-sex marriages should be recognized, but whether persons who object to such marriages on religious grounds should have the right to deny their services to couples celebrating same-sex weddings. Opponents of same-sex marriage can read the shift in public opinion as well as anyone else: a 2014 Gallup poll reported that, nationwide, 55 percent of all Americans, and nearly 80 percent of those between eighteen and twenty-nine, favor recognition of same-sex marriage. Today, same-sex couples have the right to marry in thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia. And come June, most legal experts expect the Supreme Court to require the remainder to follow suit.

Having lost that war, opponents of same-sex marriage have opened up a new battlefield—claiming that people with sincere religious objections to it should not be compelled to participate in any acts that are said to validate or celebrate same-sex marriage. There is an obvious strategic reason for this. One of the problems for opponents of same-sex marriage was that they could not credibly point to anyone who was harmed by it. Proponents, by contrast, could point to many sympathetic victims—couples who had lived in stable, committed relationships for years, but were denied the freedom to express their commitment in a state-recognized marriage, and who were therefore also denied many tangible benefits associated with marriage, including parental rights, health insurance, survivor's benefits, and hospital visitation privileges. Claims that “traditional marriage” would suffer were, by contrast, abstract and wholly unsubstantiated.

Focusing on religiously based objections puts a human face on the opposition to same-sex marriage. Should the fundamentalist Christian florist who believes that same-sex marriage is a sin be required to sell flowers for a same-sex wedding ceremony, if she claims that to do so would violate her religious tenets? There are plenty of florists, the accommodationists argue, so surely the same-sex couple can go elsewhere, and thereby respect the florist's sincerely held religious beliefs. Should a religious nonprofit organization that makes its property available to the general public for a fee be required to

rent it for a same-sex wedding? Should a religious employer be compelled to provide spousal benefits to the same-sex spouse of its employee? Should Catholic Charities' adoption service have to refer children to otherwise suitable homes of married same-sex couples? At its most general level, the question is whether religious principles justify discrimination against same-sex couples.



Beth Moore and Abby Hill signing their marriage license at the Washington County Courthouse, Fayetteville, Arkansas, May 2014

2.

In late March, Indiana Governor Mike Pence signed into law the Indiana Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), a state law that requires officials to exempt those with religious objections from any legal obligation that is not “essential” and the “least restrictive means” to serve “a compelling state interest.” Arkansas enacted a similar law at the beginning of April. Georgia and North Carolina are considering doing so. And nineteen other states already have such laws, which could permit individuals to cite religious objections as a basis for refusing to abide by prohibitions on discrimination in public accommodations, employment, housing, and the like.

The Indiana and Arkansas laws prompted strong objections from gay rights advocates and leaders of the business community, including Apple, the NCAA, Walmart, and Eli Lilly. They see the laws as thinly veiled efforts to establish a religious excuse for discrimination against gay men and lesbians. Governor Pence initially dismissed these objections as unfounded, but as criticism mounted, Indiana legislators passed an amendment specifying that the law

does not authorize a provider to refuse to offer or provide services, facilities, use of public accommodations, goods, employment, or housing...on the basis of race, color, religion, ancestry, age, national origin, disability, sex, sexual

orientation, gender identity, or United States military service.

Most of the other state RFRAs, however, have no such antidiscrimination language. In Arkansas, Governor Asa Hutchinson responded to criticism by getting the legislature to tailor the law more closely to the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act, but that law has no antidiscrimination language,

ment's free exercise of religion clause, even if the rule burdens the exercise of one's religion.

The case, *Employment Division v. Smith*, involved a Native American tribe that sought an exemption from a criminal law banning the possession and distribution of peyote; the tribe argued that the drug was an integral part of its religious ceremonies. The Court rejected the claim. Justice Scalia reasoned that to allow religious objectors to opt out of generally applicable laws would, quoting an 1878 Supreme Court precedent, “make the professed doctrines of religious belief superior to the law of the land, and in effect... permit every citizen to become a law unto himself.” The Court accordingly ruled that laws implicate the free exercise clause only if they specifically target or disfavor religion, not if they merely impose general obligations on all that some religiously scrupled individuals find burdensome.

Even before the Court in *Employment Division v. Smith* adopted this general rule, it rejected a claim that religious convictions should trump antidiscrimination laws. The IRS had denied tax-exempt status to Bob Jones University, a religious institution that banned interracial dating, and to Goldsboro Christian Schools, Inc., which interpreted the Bible as compelling it to admit only white students. The religious schools sued, asserting that the IRS's denial violated their free exercise rights. In *Bob Jones University v. United States*, the Court in 1983 summarily rejected that contention, asserting that the state's compelling interest in eradicating racial discrimination “outweigh[ed] whatever burden denial of tax benefits places on petitioners' exercise of their religious beliefs.” If the state seeks to eradicate discrimination, the reasoning goes, it cannot simultaneously tolerate discrimination.

Under these precedents, the Constitution plainly does not compel states to grant religious exemptions to laws requiring the equal treatment of same-sex marriages. Laws recognizing same-sex marriages impose a general obligation, do not single out any religion for disfavored treatment, and in any event further the state's compelling interest in eradicating discrimination against gay men and lesbians.

But can or should states adopt such exemptions as a policy matter? In some instances, to be sure, it seems appropriate to accommodate religious scruples. Everyone agrees, for example, that a priest should not be required to perform a wedding that violates his religious tenets. But it is not at all clear that those who otherwise provide goods and services to the general public should be able to cite religion as an excuse to discriminate.

Take the fundamentalist florist. Proponents of an exemption insist that the same-sex couple denied flowers can find another florist, while the florist would

either have to violate her religious tenets or lose some of her business. But this argument fails to take seriously the commitment to equality that underlies the recognition of same-sex marriage—and the harm to personal dignity inflicted by unequal treatment. Just as the eradication of race discrimination in education could not tolerate the granting of tax-exempt status to Bob Jones University, even though plenty of nondiscriminatory schools remained available, so the eradication of discrimination in the recognition of marriage cannot tolerate discrimination against same-sex marriages.

Justice Robert Jackson got the balance right when he stated, in 1944, that limits on religious freedom “begin to operate whenever [religious] activities begin to affect or collide with liberties of others or of the public.”¹ James Madison struck the same balance, noting that religion should be free of regulation only “where it does not trespass on private rights or the public peace.”² When a religious principle is cited to deny same-sex couples equal treatment, it collides with the liberties of others and trespasses on private rights, and should not prevail.

The fact that many of the state laws specifically single out religious objections to same-sex marriage for favorable treatment may itself pose constitutional issues under the First Amendment’s clause prohibiting the establishment of religion. While states are permitted some leeway to accommodate religion, the establishment clause forbids states from favoring specific religions over others, or religion over nonreligion. And when states accommodate a religious believer by simply shifting burdens to third parties, such as when religiously motivated employers are permitted to deny benefits to same-sex spouses of their employees, the state impermissibly takes sides, favoring religion. In *Estate of Thornton v. Calder* (1984), for example, the Supreme Court held that the establishment clause invalidated a state requirement that businesses accommodate all employees’ observations of the Sabbath, regardless of the impact on other workers or the business itself. State laws granting exemptions for religious objectors to same-sex marriage both give preference to religious over other conscientious objections and shift burdens to same-sex couples. Such favoritism is not only not warranted by the free exercise clause, but may be prohibited by the establishment clause.

3.

The “religious freedom restoration” laws that Indiana, Arkansas, and nineteen other states have adopted do not single out same-sex marriage as such, but they also have serious flaws. These statutes are almost certainly constitutional under existing doctrine, since they are modeled on the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act, enacted in 1993 in response to the *Smith* decision. That’s the statute the Supreme Court relied upon last year in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* to rule that

the Department of Health and Human Services must accommodate for-profit corporations that object on religious grounds to providing insurance coverage to their employees for certain kinds of contraception. (Significantly, the Court in *Hobby Lobby* found that the religious corporations’ objections could be accommodated without imposing any cost on their female employees, by extending to those for-profit businesses an existing HHS accommodation that required insurance providers to provide contraception at no cost to the employees of objecting nonprofit organizations).³

The federal and state RFRAs provide, as a statutory matter, what the Court refused to provide as a matter of constitutional law in the *Smith* decision. They require the government to



Bart Peterson and Pete McNamara exchanging vows during their marriage ceremony, performed by Marion County Clerk Beth White, Indianapolis, Indiana, June 2014

meet a very demanding standard to justify any law, no matter how neutral and generally applicable, that imposes a “substantial burden” on anyone’s exercise of religion. Because the courts are reluctant to second-guess individual religious commitments, the “substantial burden” threshold is often easily met: an individual need only articulate a plausible claim that the law requires him to do something that violates his religious principles. Religious objections could be raised to antidiscrimination laws, criminal laws, taxes, environmental and business regulations, you name it; the only limit is the creativity of religious objectors.

Once a religious objection is raised, the RFRA laws require the state to show not only that it has a “compelling” reason for denying a religious exemption, but that no more narrowly tailored way to achieve its ends is possible. This language appears to direct courts to apply the same skeptical standard—called “strict scrutiny”—applied to laws that explicitly discriminate on the basis of race, or that censor speech because of its content. This standard is so difficult to satisfy that it has been described as “strict in theory, but fatal in fact.” If the RFRAs were literally enforced, many state laws would not survive that standard of review. They

³For analysis of the *Hobby Lobby* case, see my essays “How Religious Rights Can Challenge the Common Good,” *The New York Review*, May 8, 2014, and “Supreme Court: It Could Have Been Worse,” *NYRblog*, June 30, 2014.

appear to give religious objectors what the Court in *Smith* properly refused—“a private right to ignore generally applicable laws.”

Perhaps for this reason, courts have not interpreted state RFRAs literally, but have instead generally construed them to uphold laws that impose a burden on religion as long as the state has a reasonable justification for doing so. They have looked to the purpose of the RFRAs rather than to their literal language; the laws were designed, after all, to “restore” the constitutional protection of religious free exercise that existed prior to the *Smith* decision, and while the Supreme Court before *Smith* sometimes spoke in terms of compelling interests and least restrictive means, its actual application of the free exercise clause was much more

quired by federal courts to recognize same-sex marriage, some state judges may be inclined to push back through interpretation of state RFRAs permitting religious exemptions.

When *Smith* was decided, the prohibition of the peyote ceremony seemed to many an unfair deprivation of the religious rights of Native Americans. Religious groups across the spectrum condemned the decision, and a coalition of liberals and conservatives joined together to endorse the enactment of the federal RFRA. The law was supported by the ACLU, the American Jewish Congress, and the National Association of Evangelicals, among many others; it passed the House unanimously, and passed 97–3 in the Senate. Many argued, with justification, that the Court’s approach in *Smith* was insensitive to religious minorities. As the peyote case illustrated, minority religions are unlikely to have their concerns taken seriously by the majority through the ordinary democratic process. And if a generally applicable law does interfere with the exercise of religion, the bill’s proponents asked, shouldn’t the state bear a burden of justification?

The problem is not so much that RFRAs create a presumption in favor of religious accommodation, but that the presumption is at once so easily triggered and so difficult to overcome. Advocates for religious liberty and marriage equality might find common ground were they to support modified RFRAs that would impose a less demanding standard of justification, requiring states to show that permitting a religious exemption would undermine important collective interests or impose harm on others.

The stringent standard imposed by RFRAs, by contrast, means that anytime anyone objects on religious grounds to any law, he or she is entitled to an exemption unless the state can show that it is absolutely necessary to deny the exemption in order to further a compelling end. Because these laws impose such a heavy burden of justification, they effectively transfer a great deal of decision-making authority from the democratic process to religious objectors and the courts.

Instead of the polity deciding when to grant particular religious exemptions from a specific law, RFRAs transfer to courts the power to decide that question—subject to a strong presumption that individual religious claims take precedence over democratically chosen collective goals.

Religious liberty has an important place in American society, to be sure. Accommodation of religious practices is a sign of a tolerant multicultural society—so long as the accommodation does not simply shift burdens from one minority to another. The freedom to exercise one’s religion is a fundamental value, but like other values, it has its limits. It is not a right to ignore collective obligations, nor is it a right to discriminate. Those who oppose same-sex marriage should be free to express their opposition in speech to their heart’s (and religion’s) content, but not to engage in acts of discrimination. As Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. is said to have remarked: “The right to swing my fist ends where the other man’s nose begins.” □

A Strangely Funny Russian Genius

Ian Frazier

Russia is the funniest country in the world. Some countries, like America and England, are funny mostly on purpose, while others, like Germany and France, can be funny only unintentionally. (But that counts! Being funny is tricky, so any way you do it counts.) Russia, however, is funny both intentionally (Gogol, Zoshchenko, Bulgakov) and unintentionally (Vladimir Putin singing, as he did at a televised event a few years ago, “I found my thrill on Blueberry Hill”). Given the disaster Russian history has been more or less continuously for the last five centuries, its humor is of the darkest, most extreme kind. Russian humor is to ordinary humor what backwoods fundamentalist poisonous snake handling is to a petting zoo. Russian humor is slapstick, only you actually die.

Surveys that measure such distinctions often rate Russians among the world’s least happy people. To judge from the Russians I know, this information would hold little interest one way or the other. To Russians, happiness is not the big deal it is to us; the Declaration of Independence they don’t have makes no statement about it. On the street or otherwise encountering strangers Russians don’t paste big grins on their faces, the way we tend to do. They look sternly upon reflex smilers. Their humor is powerful without a lot of jollity, and it’s hard to imagine Bulgakov, say, convulsed and weeping with laughter, as I have been when reading certain scenes in his novel *Heart of a Dog*.

Daniil Kharms, a Russian writer who came of age in the worst of Soviet times, is categorized as an absurdist, partly (I think) because it’s hard to know what else to call him. To me he makes more sense as a religious writer.

He is really funny and completely not ingratiating, simultaneously. I believe he knew he was funny and tried to be funny in his work, but I can’t find a single instance of him using the word “funny” in any of his writings, except at some distance from its straightforward meaning. In his personal notebooks, published for the first time in English in 2013, he never exults in how funny he has been or boasts that a witticism he said or wrote had ‘em rolling in the aisles. For an American humorist or comedy writer such diffidence would be out of character, if not unheard of.

Kharms’s life gave him a lot not to be jolly about. He was born Daniil Ivanovich Yuvachov in St. Petersburg in 1905. Formerly his father had been one of many young revolutionaries plotting against the life of Tsar Alexander III, a pastime that got him imprisoned for four years and then sent to a labor camp on Sakhalin Island for another eight. Later, Ivan Yuvachov became a Soviet in good standing and head of accounting at a power station. Kharms’s mother, Nadezhda Kolyubakina, was from an aristocratic background and a graduate of St. Petersburg’s Smolny Institute for Noble Girls.

Kharms offered a number of stories about his birth, such as that he was pushed back in after he came out, or that he hatched from caviar. Hunger to the point of starvation recurred in his youth, as he moved among relatives



Daniil Kharms, early 1930s

during World War I, and in his twenties and thirties in Leningrad when his notebooks record periods of going without food for days. He often got kicked out of things: from the city’s preparatory-level Peterschule at sixteen, from a college of engineering at twenty, and from the Leningrad Union of Poets at twenty-three.

He took the name Kharms when he was nineteen and he wrote under it for the rest of his life. A connection may have existed between it and the English words “charm” and “harm,” both evoking his interest in magic. It is pronounced with the same hard, throaty *h* that enlivens the Russian pronunciation of names like Hemingway and Huckleberry Finn. At that point his life was more than halfway over. The next year he met Alexander Vvedensky, Leonid Lipavsky, Yakov Druskin, and Andrei Oleinikov, his future literary collaborators and friends. Kharms wrote

hard-to-categorize plays, published two poems (the only works of his for adults to come out in his lifetime), and with Vvedensky, Nikolai Zabalotsky, and others formed a movement called OBERIU, an abbreviation made from letters in the words “Union for Real Art.” Public performances by OBERIU participants angered audiences to near riot and received threateningly negative reviews.

Much of Kharms’s published writing in his lifetime appeared in the children’s magazines *Ezh* (Hedgehog) and *Chizh* (Siskin). Russians of the later Soviet era knew him only as a writer for children, an age group he professed to despise, though his poems and stories for them have become wild classics of Russian literature. In 1931 he was arrested for putting anti-Soviet ideas in his children’s writing. He spent part of his brief sentence of exile in Kursk with Vvedensky, who was also exiled

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there. Esther Rusakova, his first wife, to whom he had been married in the late 1920s, received a five-year Gulag sentence in 1936 and later died in prison. His friend Oleinikov was shot in 1937. In 1939 Kharms was diagnosed as schizophrenic and given an exemption from military service. In August 1941 he was arrested and charged with spreading panic and anti-Soviet propaganda. Held in a psychiatric prison hospital in Leningrad during the first and hardest winter of the German blockade, he starved to death on February 2, 1942, at the age of thirty-six. In 1956 he was rehabilitated, but his poems, prose pieces, and plays did not begin to be published in Russia until the late 1980s.

It can be hard to explain why I like Kharms’s writing, or why anybody does. His appeal is unique. Joseph Brodsky once quoted Anna Akhmatova, about an improbable Kharms sentence, “Only with Kharms could that ever work. Never with anyone else.” I had never heard of Kharms before my first trip to Russia, in 1993. I spoke no Russian then and was kind of at sea. A Russian friend showed me a small paperback edition of *Starukha* (The Old Woman), a collection of Kharms’s pieces edited by Vladimir Glotser, which had come out in 1991. My friend translated a few for me. Works of humor are the hardest part of a literature to translate—even harder than poetry, because although you can think you understand a poem when you don’t, with humor you must not only understand but also laugh, and you can’t fake that. The difficulty of humor’s crossing cultural lines makes the laughter all the sweeter on the rare occasions when it succeeds.

As my friend translated Kharms’s two-page “Anecdotes from the Life of Pushkin” for me, I laughed out loud. In the dizzy incomprehensibility of Russia I had found something I could hold on to. The “Anecdotes” were short, and numbered one through seven. Anecdote number six began, “Pushkin liked to throw rocks.” That sentence struck me, and still strikes me, as sublime. It reminded me of the subgenre of cheerfully moronic writing (see the brilliant “Deep Thoughts” books by Jack Handey) that I’ve always enjoyed and try to contribute to myself. I did not know that Kharms’s piece had been written at the time of the overblown 1937 celebrations of the centennial of Pushkin’s death. (In that abysmal year of the Terror, Stalin’s press heaped crocodile praise on the great poet.)

I wrote down the translations that my friend dictated for “Anecdotes from the Life of Pushkin” and for several other pieces, and when I returned I raved about Kharms to everybody. Garrison Keillor let me read “Anecdotes” on his show at Macalester College, where it got almost no laughs. In 1998 my friend Katya Arnold and I published a children’s book, *It Happened Like This*, a collection of ten translated Kharms stories and poems accompanied by Katya’s illustrations. That also did not do well. My disgruntled editor told me it sold eight hundred copies.

Here, as translated by Eugene Ostashevsky in his OBERIU anthology, is the

WORKS DISCUSSED IN THIS ARTICLE

“I Am a Phenomenon Quite Out of the Ordinary”: The Notebooks, Diaries, and Letters of Daniil Kharms
selected, translated from the Russian, and edited by Anthony Anemone and Peter Scotto.
Academic Studies Press,
586 pp., \$69.00, \$35.00 (paper)

Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms
edited and translated from the Russian by Matvei Yankelevich.
Ardis, 288 pp., \$16.95 (paper)

The Old Woman
by Daniil Kharms,
adapted by Darryl Pinckney,
directed by Robert Wilson, at
the Brooklyn Academy of Music,
June 22–29, 2014

Moi Muzh Daniil Kharms [My Husband Daniil Kharms]
by Marina Durnovo
with Vladimir Glotser.
Moscow: B.S.G. Press, 196 pp.

OBERIU: An Anthology of Russian Absurdism
edited by Eugene Ostashevsky,
translated from the Russian
by Eugene Ostashevsky
and Matvei Yankelevich.
Northwestern University Press,
258 pp., \$22.95 (paper)

An Invitation for Me to Think
by Alexander Vvedensky,
selected and translated from the
Russian by Eugene Ostashevsky,
with additional translations
by Matvei Yankelevich.
NYRB/Poets, 135 pp.,
\$12.95 (paper)

last paragraph of a 276-word Kharms piece titled “A Magazine Article”:

Adults get offended by nothing so much as the sight of children. And so, at the time of the great emperor Alexander Vilberdat, to show a child to an adult was taken to be the highest possible affront. It topped spitting into someone’s face; and even, say, hitting the inside of the nostril in the process. A “disgrace by child” could be washed off only in a duel, by blood.

The two-paragraph story “The Adventure of Katerpillar” begins:

Mishurin was a katerpillar. For this reason, or maybe not for this reason, he liked to lie under the sofa or behind the wardrobe and suck dust. Since he wasn’t an especially neat man, sometimes for the entire day his mug was covered with dust like down.

Last summer I went to a production of a two-character play based on Kharms’s work at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Mikhail Baryshnikov and Willem Dafoe played the characters, A and B, who were interchangeable and who both represented Kharms, according to a program statement by Robert Wilson, the director. Titled *The Old Woman*, the play expanded on the longest story in the collection *Starukha*. The plot or nonplot involves old women falling out of a window, and subsequent awkward developments. Wilson’s staging relied on weird, oversized furniture, splashes of gorgeous light, and props such as a string of pink hot dogs long enough to disappear up into the flies. The action started with Baryshnikov and Dafoe, in tuxedos and with kabuki-white faces, striding onto the stage and making shrill, grating noises. Your average theatergoer might have lost heart right there, but the people in the almost full house at BAM did not fit that description. We battened hatches and waited for whatever avant-garde rush might be in store.

Exaggerated, silent-movie-style gestures and facial expressions, bursts of strange music, and sentences repeated over and over—“The miracle-worker was tall”—kept everybody guessing. Just watching Baryshnikov stand there was a delight; his every gesture had something cool about it. Dafoe’s New York City accent gave an interesting local flavor to Kharms passages that I’d never heard in any language, only seen on the page. There were laughs, but not a lot. I felt a bit better about the dead air I’d played to when I read “Anecdotes” for Garrison Keillor. Most people stayed through the whole performance, but a small stream of defections began after about twelve minutes. I had an aisle seat and occasionally heard huffs of indignation as the disaffected hurried by. This made me admire Kharms even more—still to be upsetting people after almost a century, and in a different language and country, seemed an accomplishment few writers could claim.

But as it turns out, approaching Kharms from the standpoint of humor gets you only so far. He was a writer and poet of huge ambition, as his surviving notebooks, noncontinuous from 1924 to 1941, make clear. They include

a copy of the statement he signed in the course of his interrogation after his 1931 arrest. No doubt written by his NKVD interrogator, it summed up Kharms’s personal philosophy as being “profoundly hostile to the contemporary world,” and said Kharms believed that a “utilitarian and practical” science (e.g., Marxist socialism, as applied in the Soviet Union) could never “attain the absolute heights or be capable of penetrating to the depths of the universe’s mysteries.” This laying-out of his crimes against the state accurately named his life goals. Kharms rejected not only Soviet systems of materialism, but plain rationality of any kind. He lived by his own mystical faith, sometimes turned to random pages in holy scripture for advice, and when exiled in Kursk, wrote, “my only comfort is the Bible.” As a Soviet team player he couldn’t have been more ill-suited.

The OBERIU poets’ rejection of plot, sense, logic, and the other consolations of meaning came out of a deep asceticism. “I’m always suspicious of everything comfortable and well off.” Kharms wrote to a friend in 1933. Their aspirations were also, in a sense, patriotic. To their critics, they replied that they were seeking “a genuinely new art” for all of Russia. Their methods tapped the spirituality that Russians have turned to before in drastic times. Kharms admired contemporary mathematicians of the Moscow School who used mystical, nonrational thinking to crack previously unsolved problems in set theory and the nature of infinity. He idolized the formalist poet Velimir Khlebnikov, twenty years his senior, who had cofounded an artistic movement called *zaum*, from the Russian *za um*, “beyond mind.” Kharms’s friend and close OBERIU collaborator Vvedensky declared his three themes to be “time, death, and God.” As Eugene Ostashevsky explains, “Vvedensky strikes one as a religious mystic in that very modern manner which, identifying religion with doubt, regards the absence and even nonexistence of God as facets of His infinite transcendence.”

Or to put it another way: the absurdity and chaos of existence, and the manifest absence of God in the whole ongoing mess, are themselves proofs of a transcendent God. And, may one add, of a funny God? Of a God possibly enjoying a laugh at our expense? In any event, at this point in the OBERIU philosophy we are somewhere deeper inside or underneath the group’s humorous effects.

Kharms possessed a kind of ESP that saw beyond daily commonsense life; his clairvoyance reminds me of the occasional gifts of prophecy that visited the Hunkpapa Sioux chief Sitting Bull. Kharms’s second wife, Marina Durnovo, in her book *Moi Muzh Daniil Kharms*, describes the official summons she received to enlist in the squads of women laborers who were digging trenches to defend Leningrad in the summer of 1941. Marina had severe health problems and knew she could die from the toil. Kharms promised to tell her something that would save her. For days he went to the grave of his father in a cemetery outside the city. Repeatedly he came back with nothing and said that she must keep waiting. Finally he announced that his father had revealed two words to him: “red shawl.” She made her way through

the throngs at the enlistment center repeating “red shawl” to herself and was given an exemption, while weeping, pleading mothers and wives more deserving than she were not.

Whatever powers he had, Kharms could not save himself. One Saturday morning in August, as Marina recalled, “three strange little guys” from the NKVD arrived at their apartment to take him away in a van. She begged them to take her, too. She and Kharms sat in the van, shaking. At the “Big House”—the Lyubyanka Prison—the van drove through the entrance to a place out of sight of the street. The couple were removed and brought into a reception area where two guys hustled him away and left her alone. She and Kharms had only a moment to look at each other before he was gone. She never saw him again. For months afterward she did not know where he was being held. She heard he had been sent to Novosibirsk, in Siberia, and wrote letters to friends in eastern Russia who might have information about him. Finally she learned he was at the Crosses, a prison hospital on the banks of the Neva in Leningrad.

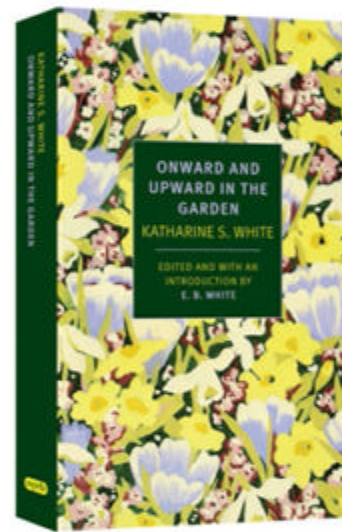
She made two long treks from her apartment to the hospital bringing packages, which were accepted, indicating he was there. The third time she went, two starving boys along the snowy path on the Neva’s ice begged her for help but she clutched to herself the tiny package of bread she was holding. When she reached the hospital the person at the window took the package and told her to wait. A few minutes later he returned, pushed the package back at her, and told her that Kharms

had died. Walking home she wished she had given the package to the boys, though it would have been impossible to save them.

In the excellent introduction to *Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms*, Matvei Yankelevich, the book’s editor and translator, argues against reading Kharms’s works as “parables of totalitarianism” or commentaries on “the absurdity of Soviet life.” He concedes that the interpretation is tempting. As one hip critic wrote of the OBERIU poets, “Their shit is hilarious. But it got them killed.” For years, I saw Kharms in that light—funny writer, martyred by Stalin. In the children’s book of Kharms pieces I coedited, we used KGB arrest papers as the background for his spooky poem about the man who left home and never came back.

Inevitably, this kind of politico-biographical interpretation accompanies Kharms’s work. In the play at BAM, large mug shots of a haggard Kharms in prison appeared on a screen as part of the backdrop. The story of suffering and martyrdom is true. But that way of looking at him can be as pat as the rational artistic conventions he disdained. Yankelevich insists, “Kharms consistently denies us our desire to draw any moral conclusions from his work.... His texts confront the desire to interpret head on.”

Nowadays, at least in America, writers often describe themselves as storytellers. They may add that stories are how human beings live, and that we connect with one another through



ONWARD AND UPWARD IN THE GARDEN

Katharine S. White

Edited and with an introduction by E. B. White

Paperback and e-book • \$17.95

In 1925 Harold Ross hired Katharine Sergeant Angell as a manuscript reader for *The New Yorker*. Within months she became the magazine’s first fiction editor, discovering and championing the work of Vladimir Nabokov, John Updike, James Thurber, Marianne Moore, and her husband-to-be, E. B. White, among others.

After years of cultivating fiction, White set her sights on a new genre: garden writing. On March 1, 1958, *The New Yorker* ran a column entitled “Onward and Upward in the Garden,” a critical review of garden catalogs, in which White extolled the writings of “seedmen and nurserymen,” those unsung authors who produced her “favorite reading matter.” Thirteen more columns followed, exploring the history and literature of gardens, flower arranging, herbalists, and developments in gardening. Two years after her death in 1977, E. B. White collected and published the series, with a fond introduction. The result is this sharp-eyed appreciation of the green world of growing things, of the aesthetic pleasures of gardens and garden writing, and of the dreams that gardens inspire.

“*Onward and Upward in the Garden* is quite a bit more than a book about flowers. It is itself a bouquet, the final blooming of an extraordinary sensibility.” —*The New York Times*

“Her writing is so wonderfully clear, so intimate... she leaves you wanting to know her thoughts of every aspect of the garden.” —Jamaica Kincaid

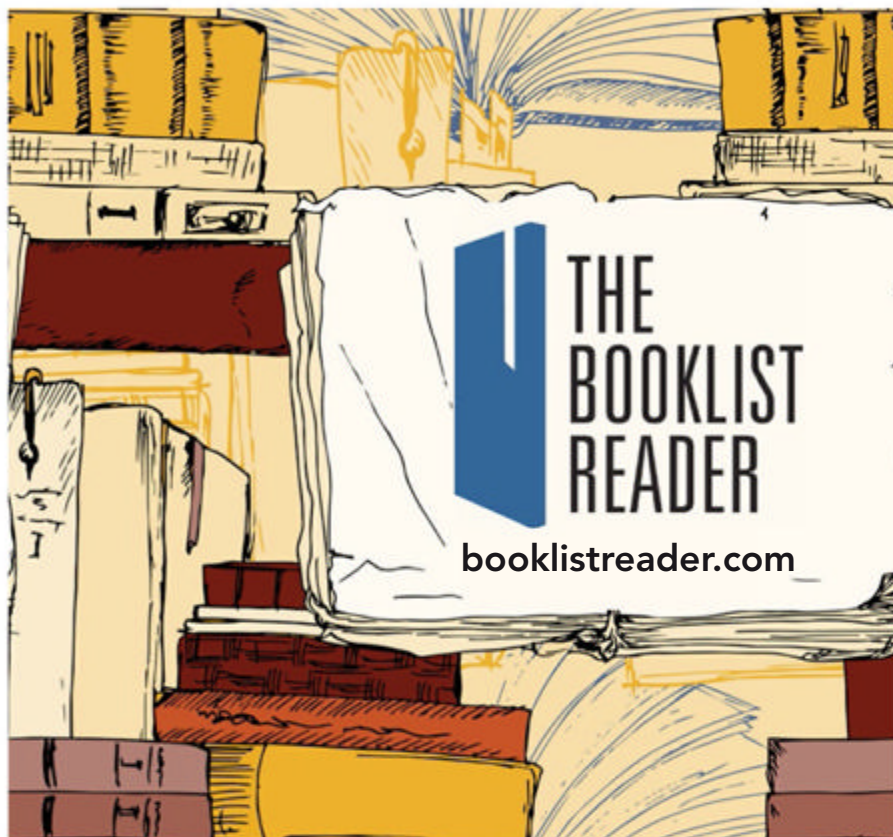
“[This collection] can be savored by the reader whose closest acquaintance with nature is the corner florist. It is a heady compost of observation, taste, wit, and scholarship.” —*Time*

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The four Melkerson children are a little bit worried upon reaching Seacrow Island, where their father has rented a cottage for the whole summer without even setting eyes on it. The island, however, turns out to be full of all sorts of surprises. A big dog, new friends, exciting exploration, and even a first romance—Seacrow Island may not be so bad after all!

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stories, and that every one of us has a story, and that we need to take ownership of our stories, and that we share our stories as people have always done sitting around the campfire in the evening, and that then the stories blend into one overarching, inclusive story, etc.

Whatever Kharms is, he's not a storyteller. In fact, he is so far from being a storyteller that his work shows up all this story-storyteller-storytelling business for the humdrum received wisdom it is. Other pleasures for me in reading Kharms are that he does not give us likable characters, explore hidden trauma, claim his own identity, heal damage done to him in childhood, or write in a prose style so beautiful that one reads it with a sharp intake of breath. Kharms remained playful and unmoved in the face of all Soviet imperatives; he's just as unsatisfying for the ordinary expectations of what writing is today.

Instead, he gives us a short tale about a crow who had four legs, or actually five legs, "though there's no reason to mention that"; and a four-page play called "Fenorov in America," which begins with the stage directions "An American street. AMERICANS are walking along the street"; and anecdotes that fall apart and give up almost before they start; and sentences like

"Since ancient times, people have wondered about what was smart and what was stupid."

During my first infatuation with Kharms I expected he would soon become a craze. When that didn't happen I went the other direction and assumed he would fade away. Somehow that hasn't happened, either. He keeps coming back. Eugene Ostashevsky, in the introduction to his collection of Vvedensky translations, notes that the women of the punk feminist collective Pussy Riot look to the OBERIU poets for inspiration, and he quotes Pussy Riot member Nadezhda Tolokonnikova in her closing statement at the group's trial on charges of "premeditated hooliganism" in 2012:

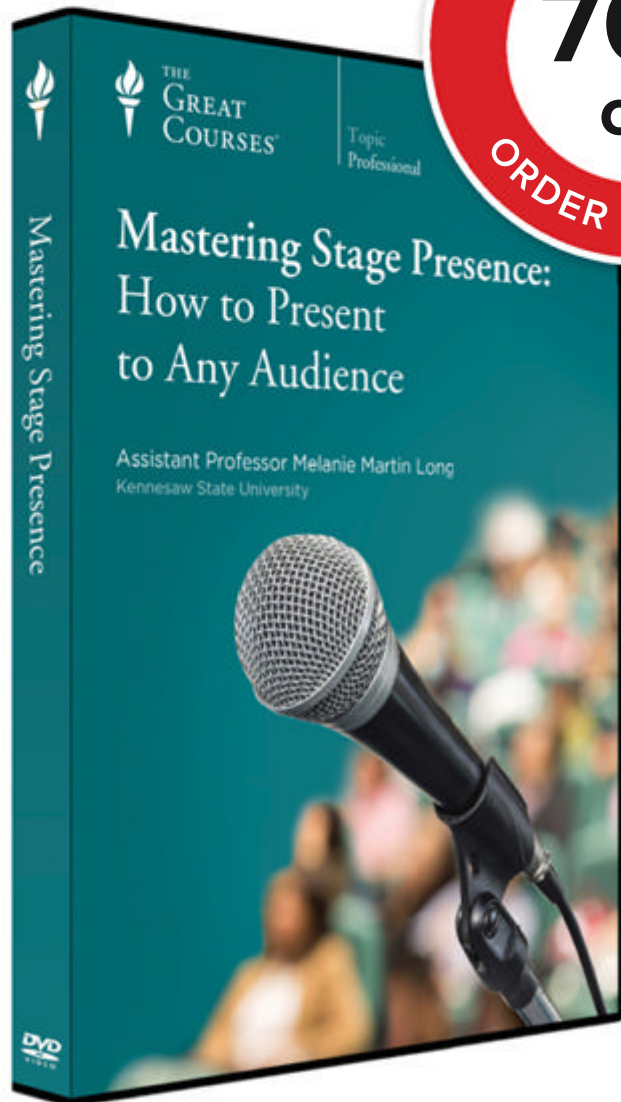
At the cost of their lives, the OBERIU poets inadvertently proved that their basic sensation of meaninglessness and alogism was correct: They had felt the nerve of their epoch. Thus art rose to the level of history.... The poets of OBERIU are thought to be dead, but they are alive. They are punished, but they do not die.

Kharms might have been gratified by these sentiments, or he might have made fun of them. Or both. □

TO THE KNIFE

You were what made us cry
in the light to start with
we could see you were there
and we saw what you were
we were hiding from you
and would have been happy
to go on with the dream
that you could not find us
cold flame sight without eyes
line where both shores the seen
and the unseen come down
into nothing to pass
between to separate
to open to divide
what had been once from what
once it had been to tell
apart bringing always
the touch of the present
though the dread of you flares
up far ahead of you
and the memory of
you lingers and goes on
burning ahead of you
we plead with you who have
no ears for us we beg
in private and in vain
do not see us at all
ever we are not here
or if you see us do
not touch us wherever you
were going to touch us
or if you do touch us
divide us from something
it would be good to lose
and save us for ourselves

—W. S. Merwin



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Syria: Death from Assad's Chlorine

Annie Sparrow

Chlorine, which is widely used for water purification, sanitation, and the manufacture of modern medicines, is essential for human well-being in today's world. As epidemics of waterborne diseases escalate across Syria in besieged and opposition-held areas, the Syrian government's systematic withholding of the primary means to decontaminate water in these areas can be considered an indirect weapon of mass destruction. However, although minute quantities of chlorine are life-saving, if too much is inhaled in its gaseous form, it can cause death in under thirty minutes. Recently, the Syrian government has used chlorine directly against civilians as a chemical weapon. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has thus transformed a principal element of public health into a tool of both disease and terror.

1.

Good Chlorine

Human life depends on water—clean water. Attempts to purify water are described in ancient Hindu, Sanskrit, and Greek texts, and passing references are even made in the Old Testament.

Yet the means to kill waterborne microbes was lacking until the discovery of pure chlorine in the early nineteenth century. Nowadays, we take a constant supply of safe water for granted, and chlorine has been our principal agent of water purification for well over a century. In the US, it has been mandated to decontaminate drinking water since 1914.

Chlorine, one of the basic elements, was isolated in gaseous form in 1810 by Sir Humphry Davy, and named for its pale green color (*khlōros*, in ancient Greek). Its ability to decontaminate derives from its oxidizing properties: it rapidly reacts with and inactivates the proteins that hold cells together. In sufficient concentration, it is poisonous to all species of life.¹ Chlorine's potential for industrial sanitation initially went unnoticed because its discovery predated by several decades the germ theory of disease. At that time disease was believed to be caused by miasma: poisonous particles of dead and decaying matter suspended in foul-smelling clouds arising from graves, swamps, and cesspools.

However, the focus on putrid smells as a sign of miasma led to chlorine's first clinical use. In 1847, Ignác Semmelweis, a Hungarian physician in Vienna, used chlorine to get rid of the stench of death on his hands after handling cadavers before going onto the maternity ward, and he made his residents do likewise. The death rate on his ward plummeted, but his efforts to broadly institute hygienic practices in hospitals were rejected by the medical community, and he was eventually committed to an insane asylum, where he died of overwhelming sepsis two weeks later.

Meanwhile, cholera epidemics had started appearing in the West. Cholera was spread by pilgrims returning from the Ganges, its ancient reservoir; there

were six pandemics and millions of deaths. Early outbreaks in London and New York in the 1830s were covered up, but they got the British physician John Snow, known for his discovery of the link between sewage contaminating the water supply and this deadly disease, thinking about germ theory. Fearing the medical community's antagonism, he proceeded cautiously, calling cholera a "poison," but he famously convinced officials to remove the handle of the Broad Street water pump during the London cholera epidemic in 1854, which resulted in a decline in the number of cases in the neighborhood.



Mass graves for the hundreds of civilians who died in sarin attacks on the Syrian town of Zamalka in eastern Ghouta in August 2013. After the attacks the Syrian government, under the threat of US military retaliation, agreed to the elimination of its chemical weapons but was able to keep its stockpiles of chlorine, which it has reportedly used in attacks on civilians.

This prepared the way for the redesign of the water supply system and the widespread use of chlorine to disinfect drinking water. Decades later, Pasteur finally proved the relationship between germs and contagious disease.

The practical application of germ theory—pasteurization, sanitation, vaccinations, and antibiotics—forms the basis of modern medicine. Cholera, as well as typhoid—two bacterial diseases that killed more people than all wars put together—were finally brought under control in the developed world by the widespread use of chlorine. In 1900, typhoid alone killed more than 25,000 people in the United States. By 1960, that had dropped to 21.

Today 90 percent of water sources in the United States and Europe rely on chlorine for safe water. This is still the most important use of chlorine, and yet so commonplace that we have forgotten its vital role in human well-being. There are other ways to treat water, but chlorine is unique in keeping water pure all the way to the kitchen tap. Bottled water abounds, but in New York City, for example, we don't think twice about drinking our tap water.

For many of us, when we think of chlorine, we think of bleach. We use it to whiten whites in our laundry, sanitize our kitchens, and disinfect our toilets. In hospitals, it is the industrial killing machine of microbes in operating rooms. In West Africa, it is an essential ally in the ongoing fight to stop the spread of Ebola. Chlorination inac-

tivates the germs in phlegm and other bodily fluids that tend to seep into pool water, protecting us from colds, flu, conjunctivitis, and other diseases.

Beyond public health, chlorine is fundamental to modern medicine. Chlorine compounds form the building blocks for 90 percent of modern drugs: antibiotics and antimalarials, asthma drugs and antihistamines, chemotherapeutic agents and cholesterol-lowering agents, anesthetics, common pain-relieving agents like Tylenol, and anxiety-reducing drugs such as Xanax, to name a few. John Snow is also celebrated for his anesthetic expertise: he safely used

chloroform, a chlorine compound, for the delivery of two of Queen Victoria's children. PVC, an acronym so common we have to pause to remember what it stands for (polyvinyl chloride), is used in the manufacture of 85 percent of medical devices: not just sterile gloves, dialysis tubing, urinary catheters, and bags for intravenous fluids, but also X-ray films, prosthetics, prescription glasses, and now Ebola protection suits.

But the importance of chlorine in public health in the developed world has no counterpart elsewhere. Louis Pasteur once stated, "80 percent of diseases are in what we drink." More than one hundred years later, little has changed. Polio, cholera, typhoid, and other waterborne diseases are still major concerns in the developing world.

Recognition of Pasteur's truth was reflected by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2000 when it cited clean water and sanitation as crucial determinants of the right to health—a connection reiterated in the Millennium Development Goals.² In 2012, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that unsafe water supplies, sanitation, and hygiene are still responsible for the deaths of nearly one million people annually. Haiti's cholera epidemic in 2010, brought in by UN peacekeepers from Nepal, compounded the country's widespread misery, causing nearly

²Goal 7 seeks to cut in half by this year the number of people without "sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation."

2.

Bad Chlorine

Though barely recognizable after four years of one of the worst conflicts since World War II, Syria used to be a middle-income country. For decades, chlorine was routinely used for safe water, sanitation, and the manufacture of medicines for both domestic consumption and export. But for several years before the beginning of the popular uprising in March 2011, and in part contributing to it, the Syrian government denied many public health measures to areas of the country that were politically unsympathetic to it, selectively withholding not only chlorine for treatment of water contaminated by sewage, but also routine childhood vaccinations. That continues today, with widespread denial of chlorine to Deir Ezzor, Raqqa, Daraa, the outskirts of Damascus, and other areas outside government control. A few drops of bleach would be sufficient to disinfect water and hands, but it is simply unattainable. In besieged areas, such as Ghouta, water is frequently cut off altogether as a punitive measure.

The consequences of this deprivation are magnified by mass displacement, with ten million civilians having been forced to flee their homes, often leaving three or four families together in households of appalling and unhygienic conditions. 642,000 Syrians live under siege, in even worse conditions. Myiasis—a maggot-ridden wound infection associated with lack of water—appeared in Ghouta last year, at the same time as a water cutoff. In Deir Ezzor, untreated tap water comes directly from the Euphrates River, two hundred yards downstream from a sewage pipe. As a result, there were more than 30,000 cases of hepatitis A across the country in 2014, with several fatalities in young children. This disease is rarely seen in the US, and hardly ever in fatal form.

On February 24 of this year, WHO issued an alert on the risk of cholera in Syria, a concern heightened by the sudden outbreak in Hama in mid-March of more than five hundred cases of acute watery diarrhea. The combination of inadequate surveillance, the absence of laboratories to test for cholera, and previous cover-ups by the Syrian Ministry of Health of cholera in 2005 and 2009 and polio in 2013 suggests that cholera may indeed be back. Even my colleagues in Damascus, where most water is still chlorinated, have suffered from hepatitis; others have succumbed to typhoid. Typhoid is now endemic in southeastern Deir Ezzor—the same area where polio first reappeared in 2013.

The governorate of Daraa has just reported more than two hundred cases of hand, foot, and mouth disease, which spreads easily to children exposed to unchlorinated water that has been contaminated by the stool of an infected child. Scabies and lice are everywhere. Many other water-related diseases, such as polio, giardia, schisto-

somiasis, and Legionella, are difficult to diagnose and treat without specialist doctors, well-equipped health facilities to collect blood, stool, skin, and urine samples, and labs for isolation of the pathogen—most of which the Syrian government has destroyed in opposition-held areas.

Polio, the most devastating disease of childhood, might never have re-emerged in Syria if chlorine had still been available. The polio virus is extremely hard to kill, and chlorine is one of the few agents capable of destroying it. It did not reappear in neighboring Iraq despite eight years of war with inconsistent vaccination but consistent use of chlorine. In Syria, however, the withholding of polio vaccine was compounded by the lack of safe water and sewage treatment, and this horrific disease reappeared after less than two years of war.

Moreover, infection of pregnant women is once again commonplace, as are postoperative wound infections. The destruction of the pharmaceutical industry in Aleppo in 2012—as part of the government’s systematic assault on health care in opposition-held areas—means that there are no longer the means to produce antibiotics like Cefaclor, commonly used for chest and ear infections, or antiseptics like chlorhexidine, a routine scrub for surgery. Recently, of four cases of confirmed malaria, one man died due to lack of chloroquine, a chlorine-based compound.

3.

Deadly Chlorine

Having made civilians in opposition-held areas suffer from the lack of chlorine, the Syrian government is now, in a cruel irony, making it suffer from too much chlorine—in the form of chemical weapons. The chemical massacre in eastern Ghouta in August 2013, which used missiles loaded with sarin, killed some 1,400 civilians. In a deal negotiated by Washington and Moscow under the threat of military retaliation, the Syrian government was forced to give up a sizable part of its chemical arsenal, including 581 tons of the precursors of sarin and twenty tons of ready-to-use sulfur mustard.

However, because chlorine has legitimate uses, the government was not required to eliminate its chlorine stockpiles. Since then, Assad has periodically used chlorine as a chemical weapon—even though such use violates the Convention on Chemical Weapons, which Syria has ratified.

If chlorine is not heavily diluted, inhaling it in its gaseous form causes choking and can be fatal. According to the UN Human Rights Council’s Commission of Inquiry for Syria and an Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) report of September 10, 2014, chlorine was repeatedly used in this way as a weapon in the Syrian villages of Talmenes, Al Tamanah, and Kafr Zita in April 2014.

The reports of the OPCW and Commission of Inquiry include evidence collected by my colleagues Dr. Khaled Almilaji and Hazem Alhalabi, members of the Chemical Biological Response Network (CBRN) Task Force, which obtained the forensic samples proving that chlorine had been used as a weapon in Syria. In April 2014 alone,

there were ten attacks in which chlorine was dropped on civilians in villages in northern Syria, killing eight and affecting almost nine hundred. All but one of the attacks occurred at night and involved the aerial dropping of barrels of compressed chlorine gas, which spread when they hit their target.

Only the Syrian government forces have helicopters that can carry out such bombing. Chlorine gas is not nearly as deadly as mustard gas, which killed more than 90,000 in the trenches of World War I—but it is extremely cheap, does not require the sophisticated missiles needed to deliver sarin, and is highly effective as a weapon of terror. As one Syrian doctor told me:

We are used to the density of bloodshed. To damaged and



mutilated people.... But the fear and suffering that these attacks create is unbearable, even for us.

Victims of chemical attacks must be washed, decontaminated, and ventilated, and this should be done out in the open where the water can be drained and the gas can be dispersed. Yet because of the Syrian government’s systemic attacks on the doctors and hospitals in opposition-held areas, all the remaining functioning hospitals there are now literally underground. That makes the dispersal of gas and the drainage of water slow and difficult, endangering medical staff. The Talmenes attack on April 21, 2014, occurred while I was teaching Syrian doctors on the Turkish border. One of my colleagues helped treat the hundreds of patients, several of whom died:

I was on the ground with the patients, washing them. Of course, we knew we were also in danger, but could not even begin to take care of ourselves when faced with so much suffering. And what was there to change into? We had half a dozen pairs of gloves between us. No protective suits. I’m still wearing the same suit. My eyes and hands hurt, but I’m ok.

On March 6, 2015, the UN Security Council condemned the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon, though at Russia’s insistence the council didn’t name the Syrian government as the perpetrator or impose any sanctions.

And yet ten days later, I watched videos sent by my Syrian colleagues showing dying and newly dead children, unbearably vulnerable to the chlorine dropped on them. After the first chlorine bomb went off at 8:30 PM, one entire family—three very young children, their parents, and their grandmother—took cover in a basement, knowing there would likely be a second bomb. The lights literally have gone out in most of Syria, so it was pitch-black in Sarmin, a village in the northwestern governorate of Idlib, where the attack occurred. No one could see the yellow gas, but they could smell it. The second bomb struck their house, trapping them inside, where they would suffer increasing difficulty breathing and ultimately suffocate to death. Dr. Muhammad Tennari described the chaos:

The children came in their sleeping suits. The grandmother was dead on arrival but there was nowhere for her body. We had to place two of the children on top of her body, trying to resuscitate them.... We barely had water to wash patients, let alone oxygen or life-saving ventilators. No clothes for the children, left naked. And other casualties kept on coming.

Journalists questioned my colleagues: “Did you hear any strange sounds? Did you smell anything strange? Why didn’t you see any yellow gas, if it was chlorine? And isn’t atropine used for sarin, not chlorine?” Dr. Almilaji replied:

It was nighttime, no one can see anything. We hear rockets all the time. There are months when shelling happens twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. We hear snipers. Missiles. Drones. Long-range cannons. Al-Assad’s arsenal has many different sounds, we know them all. As for atropine, if it is a chemical attack, we give atropine, period. The same emergency drugs are always given in chemical attacks—oxygen, atropine, salbutamol, hydrocortisone even in the best functioning hospitals in Aleppo, let alone field hospitals in rural Idlib. But there is no antidote for chlorine, a choking agent. We are not taught about chemical weapons in medical school. We may not know what we are dealing with, and can only give the drugs that we have.

Since March 10, worried about ISIS attacks emanating from Syria, Turkey has closed its borders, increasing the difficulty for Syrian doctors trying to bring out samples to prove that chlorine attacks had taken place. But even without laboratory proof, the smell and effects of chlorine leave no question that this was a chemical attack. Assad has repeatedly denied the use of chlorine, citing as proof the absence of forensic samples that can be delivered for analysis in laboratories. This defense echoes the government’s cover-up of the reemergence of polio by saying it wasn’t proven in a lab. In the nights after March 16, including during my time on the Syrian border at the end of the month, there were some two dozen additional chemical attacks consistent with either pure chlorine or a chlorine cocktail, with hundreds affected, mostly women and children.

The March 16 attack on Sarmin was part of intensified fighting around Idlib, which fell to opposition forces on March 28. Tens of thousands of civilians have fled but are unable to reach the safety of Turkey and thus remain vulnerable to the government’s retaliation. Humanitarian aid is still allowed in, but many agencies backed by Western governments have joined the Syrian government in blocking the delivery of chlorine to protect public health in ISIS-controlled territory. Surgeons are denied minute amounts of this most basic tool of preventive health out of fear that the few pints used to disinfect operating rooms will be seized by ISIS to make chemical weapons. Yet for two years now, ISIS has repeatedly allowed the safe passage of not only disinfecting agents but also millions of liters of pesticides to combat the spread of leishmaniasis in Aleppo and Idlib.

For four years, the Assad government has been treating Syrian doctors in opposition-held areas as terrorists, penalizing, incarcerating, and executing them for providing care to anyone in need. To add insult to injury, Western aid agencies and donor governments are now compounding the problem by denying them basic tools of public health out of a singular and often exaggerated preoccupation with ISIS.

However, sending atropine, a drug often used for emergency resuscitation, is still allowed, which now verges on the obscene to many doctors. As Dr. Majed, who worked on the front lines of the chemical massacre in eastern Ghouta, said to me recently:

The message the Syrians are getting [from Western governments] when atropine arrives is, “We know your government is going to kill your children in the most depraved way possible—and we are not going to stop him [Assad], but we will be able to say we responded.”

At the very least, Turkey should reopen its borders for the safe passage of refugees, doctors, and patients—and to enable proof of chlorine’s use as a chemical weapon. The closure of the borders is not only devastating for the people of Syria; it is also shortsighted for the people of the surrounding region. Microbes need neither permission nor passports.

Clean water goes a long way toward controlling polio, cholera, typhoid, and diarrheal disease of all kinds. Misuse

of the tools of public health, and loss of control of these highly contagious diseases, have regional and global repercussions.

As for the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon, it needs more than general condemnation without consequences

by a Security Council in paralysis. There is yet more life than death in Syria—eight hundred babies are born each month in Ghouta alone. The youngest children always suffer the worst of war—from the disease, the destruction, the degradation and insecurity. They

deserve protection from an inhumane regime that has delivered diseases from the Dark Ages and repeatedly targeted civilians with deadly weapons without any meaningful international response. The international community is now preoccupied by the threat of ISIS, but

the people of opposition-held Syria will not provide their essential support to anti-ISIS efforts if the world continues to ignore the greater slaughter, disease, and deprivation caused by the Syrian government. □

—April 2, 2015

The Ravishing Painting of Piero di Cosimo

Anthony Grafton



Piero di Cosimo: Prometheus Fashioning the First Man, circa 1510–1515

Piero di Cosimo: The Poetry of Painting in Renaissance Florence

an exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., February 1–May 3, 2015; and the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, June 23–September 27, 2015. Catalog of the exhibition by Gretchen A. Hirschauer, Dennis Geronimus, and others. National Gallery of Art/Galleria degli Uffizi, 248 pp., \$60.00; \$40.00 (paper)

Great nineteenth-century critics taught us to imagine the Italian Renaissance as a world of nymphs walking gracefully on flowery meadows. They liked Piero di Cosimo, who painted his share of nymphs, but they did not have a great deal to say about him. Jacob Burckhardt praised the “extraordinarily solid composition and characters” of Piero’s *Immaculate Conception with Saints* in the Uffizi and the “completely charming details” of his *Liberation of Andromeda*. There he stopped. Walter Pater bracketed Piero in passing with his own favorite among the Florentine artists, Botticelli. But he took the comparison no further. Relatively few of the great

nineteenth-century collectors sought Piero’s works. They wound up scattered, some of them in small museums. Apart from one important exhibition in New York in 1938, it has not been possible to see many of them at once.

But new generations of art historians began to ask new questions. Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl were fascinated by the metamorphoses that classical mythology underwent in the Middle Ages, as form and content pulled apart. Artists, they argued, portrayed gods and goddesses as medieval rulers, and medieval warriors as classical heroes. In the Renaissance, by contrast, form and content merged again, as accurate philology gave the ancient stories a spectacular new form. Panofsky reexamined the panels in which Piero conjured up the ancient myths. The Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, Connecticut, had a gorgeous painting, well populated with nymphs, which had traditionally been identified as the story of Hylas, the lover of Hercules. Putting all his immense learning into play, Panofsky showed that it represented the expulsion of Hephaestus from Olympus—and that Piero’s version of the myth incorporated minute details from ancient texts.

Panofsky also examined Piero’s scenes of primitive hunters and artisans at work. He showed that these too had a philological core, since they were inspired by the accounts of early human society in ancient Latin texts. Not all of Panofsky’s interpretations—especially his effort to show that several of these paintings formed a distinct series—have won general support. But he revealed the range of Piero’s artistic interests and techniques and the deep and questing power of his mind. All of these qualities are on view in the National Gallery’s wonderful exhibition, which covers the artist’s entire career.

Like Botticelli, Piero worked in many different fields of art. He produced some of the most handsome and dignified religious paintings of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries: altarpieces for churches and other religious institutions, as well as tondi, large circular paintings of members of the Holy Family, and paintings of individual saints, for private houses. But he also painted *spalliere*—wooden panels meant to serve as the backs of settles or other pieces of furniture, to be attached to the chests known as *cassoni*, or to form part of the paneling of a room. Piero used these, as well

as some larger panels, for secular and mythological subjects. He crafted startlingly vivid portraits of individuals and strangely evocative images of religious objects.

The seven rooms devoted to Piero di Cosimo in Washington open up a world of ravishing visual interest. The paintings, hung on colored walls with the National Gallery’s special precision and flare, display scenes that seem at first to contrast wildly with one another. Piero’s works of sacred art, whether aimed at public display or composed as a background for private prayer and meditation, are stately. The Virgin Mary dominates, whether she is greeting the aged Elizabeth (soon to bear John the Baptist) or looking after her son. In either case, her decorum and gravity impress: she looks like one of those demure young Florentine women whom Alessandra Macinchi degli Strozzi would inspect in church while looking for a wife for her own son. The saints who appear with Mary share her gravity.

The longer one inspects these marvelous paintings, though—and the more one surveys their background

detail—the more surprises they offer. Why does a bird fly distractingly past the leftmost arch in Piero's monumental *Madonna and Child with Saints Onuphrius and Augustine*? Why must two baby angels and one sculpted head with wings help to keep the baldachin of the Virgin's throne upright in another painting, while martyred saints press forward gently for their dual mystic marriage with the infant Jesus? Why give the angel who plays a three-stringed rebec for another infant Jesus a face joyous to the point of goofiness? In most cases, the gravity of the holy figures in the foreground is accentuated by the lively detail of street scenes and façades behind them. But sometimes—as with the massacre of the Holy Innocents by Herod that unfolds in turmoil far behind the Virgin and Elizabeth—the relation between foreground and background seems simply puzzling.

The mythologies—both the two great panels of Vulcan, fallen on the island of Lemnos and working with Aeolus, the god of the winds, at his forge, and the smaller panels that narrate the myths of Bacchus, Perseus, and Prometheus—are cast in a very different key. Here everything is motion, action, energy. The Bacchic procession to find honey ends in wild comedy as Bacchus's sidekick Silenus is stung by bees; the Perseus and Prometheus panels, like magnificently anachronistic graphic novels, cram two or three incidents from ancient sources into every single image.

Nothing could seem less like the celestial world of the Virgin than the flowery island of Lemnos. Here, as Panofsky showed, Vulcan, lamed by his fall, tries to stand up after being thrown from Olympus for defending his mother against Jupiter. He finds himself in the midst of six nymphs gathering flowers, in the best fashion of Botticelli's young women. Panofsky wrote that the nymphs "show no amorous excitement whatsoever." He was partly right. Two converse; one, a study in the Ghirlandai-esque, guards her flowers as she turns her cool, perfect profile toward the boy. But another nymph appears above her, at the right edge of the painting. She drops her bouquet and looks ready to grab the handsome boy. Her broad grin shows that she would know how to have a good time with him. This disorderly figure seems provocatively close to her more decorous companion, as if Piero were challenging Florentine convention and Botticelli, its great master. It's a sexy as well as a weirdly gorgeous image.

Fitting these wonderfully disparate works together isn't easy, especially since much of Piero's work was probably dispersed almost as soon as it was made. Tradition holds that he won his fame in large part as a creator of temporary arts. If the Paris of the late nineteenth century was a city of banquets, the Florence of the later fifteenth century was a city of processions. Some accompanied religious feasts—like the parade of the Company of the Magi that commemorated the Epiphany on January 6, as the Medici and their close friends, wearing fancy dress, celebrated the birth of the Savior and the beginning of Carnival.

Others were private—like the procession of two hundred pages, accompanying an ever-burning heart, that a Florentine patrician sent to declare his love to a young woman. Every one of them needed floats and costumes. Piero specialized in these. According

to his sixteenth-century biographer Giorgio Vasari:

It was certainly a very beautiful thing to see, by night, twenty-five or thirty pairs of horses, most richly caparisoned, with their riders in costume, according to the subject of the invention, and six or eight grooms to each rider, with torches in their hands, and all clothed in one and the same livery, sometimes more than four hundred in number; and then the chariot, or triumphal car, covered with ornaments, trophies, and most bizarre things of fancy; altogether, a thing which makes men's intellects more subtle, and gives great pleasure and satisfaction to the people.

Vasari showed special enthusiasm for the Car of Death that Piero constructed in conditions of special secrecy:



Piero di Cosimo: Portrait of Francesco Giamberti, circa 1482-1483

An enormous car drawn by buffaloes, black all over and painted with skeletons and white crosses; and upon the highest point of the car stood a colossal figure of Death, scythe in hand, and right round the car were a number of covered tombs; and at all the places where the procession halted for the chanting of dirges, these tombs opened, and from them issued figures draped in black cloth, upon which were painted all the bones of a skeleton, over their arms, breasts, flanks, and legs.

The spectacle "filled the whole city with fear and marvel together." Old men, including some of Piero's assistants, still remembered this spectacle in Vasari's time, long after Piero's death. Some read a political meaning into it. They argued that Piero had meant to predict that the Medici would soon return to Florence (as they did in 1512).

How far to trust Vasari is not clear. The documentation for Piero's life is scanty. Vasari—as we will see—followed his own agenda in describing the artist. And the Washington exhibition daringly makes one point—one that curators rarely emphasize—brilliantly clear. When we look at and try to assess Piero's work, we confront fragile painted surfaces that have changed form and color and been subjected to restoration over time. A massive al-

tarpiece from the Yale Museum, still undergoing repair, gives in its damaged contours and faded colors a sense of the metamorphoses that paintings may experience in the restorer's workshop—and makes us uncertain and hesitant about what they might originally have looked like, always a good thing. In many of Piero's paintings, the Virgin wears garments of a relatively pale blue, less rich in texture and color than those of the saints and donors who flank her. Is this effect deliberate? Or did Piero use a blue pigment cheaper than ultramarine, which faded? Questions like these—as well as questions about the meaning and purpose of some of the most vibrant and memorable images—haunt the show.

Piero knew and drew on the work of other Florentine artists. Selections and flourishes from their work reappear in his—for example, the splendid clutch of riders, inspired by Paolo Uccello, whose horses' hooves raise a cloud of dust on one side of his panel painting *The Building of a Palace*. But like Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, and other of his colleagues, Piero always kept an especially sharp eye on what the Flemings were doing. Like them, he must have been surprised, delighted, and inspired in 1483 when the Portinari Altarpiece by Hugo van der Goes was transferred, with considerable public ceremony, from Bruges to Florence, where it remains.

Piero learned an enormous amount from northern painters like van der Goes. They showed him how individual features reveal character in portraits. They taught him how to build up the magnificently textured, almost tactile cloaks and borders worn by so many of the saints in his sacred paintings—and the fantastic hilly landscapes inhabited by so many of his holy figures. They probably inspired the details, rendered with hypnotic exactitude, that appear in so many of his paintings, where they serve no clear dramatic purpose but delight the slow, careful examiner. Vasari singles out his

Visitation of Our Lady, with S. Nicholas, and a S. Anthony who is reading with a pair of spectacles on his nose, a very spirited figure. Here he counterfeited a book bound in parchment, somewhat old, which seems to be real, and also some balls that he gave to the S. Nicholas, shining and casting gleams of light and reflections from one to another.

Surely Piero also found inspiration in Flemish painting for the strange animals and monstrous beings that people so many of his works. As Panofsky remarked, Piero's passion for depicting plants and animals "and his delicate sense of luminary and atmospheric values, lend a definitely Northern flavour to his pictures."

But Piero was far too original simply to borrow and learn from others. He gave himself the same tests, again and again, though he did not always pass them: for example, depicting feet, which he did in an elegantly detailed manner, down to their splayed toes, and depicting hands, which he did rather awkwardly. Piero painted a great many babies, especially images of the baby Jesus. Some of them he modeled on Roman sculpture, but he also showed a real gift for bringing out the soft flesh and staccato movements of

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human infants. He loved setting himself exercises in foreshortening—such as the prone bodies and statues that appear in his wild hunting scene and in his *Building of a Palace*. Often—as in the horse and rider coming directly at the onlooker in the *Palace* panel—Piero pulled off this effect with bravura. At times, though, his foreshortened figures look awkward, and seem inconsistent with other aspects of the same painting's spatial order.

Piero's work raises questions of many kinds. How much, one wonders, did he actually know of the ancient myths and other materials that formed some of his favorite subjects? We do not even know for certain if he was literate. Yet we do know that he paid close attention—some of the time—to tiny details in the ancient writers who were his ultimate sources. Consider the panel painting of Perseus saving Andromeda from a sea monster, which he created for the bedroom of Filippo Strozzi's enormous Florentine palace. It's a dazzling image, as Vasari made clear. He praised everything from the charmingly intricate and implausible hills of the setting ("the landscape is very beautiful, and the coloring sweet and full of grace") to the handsome and equally implausible creature that Perseus has to kill ("it is not possible to find a more bizarre or more fantastic sea-monster"). The picture swarms with curious detail.

The basic account of the myth came to Piero—as it did to everyone in his time—from the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. And his painting incorporated any number of points from the original text. Ovid tells us that Andromeda looked to Perseus like a marble statue. Piero's Andromeda, bound to a tree for the monster and nude from the waist up, is pale enough to be a sculptor's work. Ovid describes Perseus's sword as curved: Piero's Perseus hacks away with a scimitar. Piero was selective: he found no place in his dramatic account of Perseus's conquest of the monster for the comic Ovidian moment when the flying hero, stunned by Andromeda's beauty, almost forgets to flap his wings. And he adapted creatively. In Ovid's poem, Andromeda's hair, moved by the wind, shows Perseus that she is still alive. In Piero's painting, it's Perseus's mantle that is animated by the wind of his passage—and the sea, churned into motion by the monster.

How did Piero gain access to these textual details—or indeed to the more obscure notion that Vulcan, when he fell to the island of Lemnos, was greeted by nymphs? As Panofsky explained, they are not a feature of any celebrated ancient retelling of the myth. Following Greek sources, the late antique grammarian Servius remarked in his commentary on Virgil that the "Sintii" raised Vulcan on Lemnos. Medieval scribes, not recognizing the "Sintii," turned them into nymphs (and, in another version, apes). As the joke goes, an economist cast up on a desert island with a heap of canned goods assumes a can opener. An art historian cast up in a museum with the classicizing work of an erudite artist may assume a humanist adviser—a learned man who either laid out a program for the artist—as Leonardo Bruni did, for example, for Ghiberti's second set of bronze doors for the Florentine Baptistery—or at least provided him with a summary and

useful details of what the ancients had written. But this figure, if he existed, remains elusive.

So do the exact sources that Piero drew on, as Dennis Geronimus makes clear in his discussion of Piero's "primitive strain." For he always used the classics, as he used Ovid, for his own distinctive ends. Two of the most striking of Piero's panels, now in the Metropolitan Museum, depict what must be the earliest stage of human civilization. In one of them, humans, satyrs, and centaurs cooperate to hunt down and kill animals that a fire has flushed from their hiding places in the forest. In the other, similarly varied hunters join human women on a shoreline from which the fire is still visible. The presence of crude ships—and the fact that two women, clad in skins, cooperate in nursing a pup of some sort—reveal that at least some of these creatures (it's not clear which) have developed emotional lives and created some technical devices.

The story Piero tells here comes from two Roman writers—the Epicurean poet Lucretius, who described the discovery of fire and its uses at the start of human history and emphasized the uniqueness of man's ability to hunt, and the architectural writer Vitruvius, who also highlighted the vital role of fire in creating civilization—and the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, who told a similar tale, making lightning the cause of the fire. The discovery of fire led in their accounts to the development of everything else, from clothing to language. Culture itself was contingent, the result of conflagrations set by chance.

In weaving his vision of early human history from these threads, as Panofsky pointed out, Piero offered a vision radically different from the biblical one. Giovanni Boccaccio, who summarized Vitruvius's story of fire in his handbook *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, felt compelled to note that "that very talented man had not read the Pentateuch. Near the beginning of that he would have read of a very different creator of language, Adam, who named everything." What did Piero think he was saying when he portrayed the origins of humanity—and even, apparently, its development from a much more polymorphous set of beings—in these starkly anti-Christian terms? He did not explain. Painters, after all, find it harder than writers to include the sort of saving parenthetical remark that enabled Boccaccio to 'scape whipping.

It's not an easy question. Piero, as Geronimus shows, did not draw on any single one of the relevant Roman writers in detail as he laid out his vision of early human life. He followed Florentine custom—and Alberti's advice—rather than an ancient example or story when he added to the festive procession that celebrates Perseus's wedding

with Andromeda a bearded figure who looks out and catches the eye of anyone looking at the image: very likely a self-portrait. But Piero probably did learn from Lucretius to emphasize the importance of hunting. And that is revealing. The texts that tell the story of fire and civilization were all known in Florence. The Florentine humanists Poggio Bracciolini and Niccolò Niccoli brought Lucretius back into circulation. Alberti studied both Lucretius and Vitruvius. And Poggio himself made a Latin adaptation of the relevant parts of Diodorus.

Yet not everyone who owned these books read them—much less drew the rich messages from them that Piero did. Ada Palmer, a historian at the

Leonardo found inspiration in spots on the wall, Piero

would sometimes stop to gaze at a wall against which sick people had been for a long time discharging their spittle, and from this he would picture to himself battles of horsemen, and the most fantastic cities and widest landscapes that were ever seen; and he did the same with the clouds in the sky.

Given to long, solitary works and caprices, Piero, according to Vasari and others, would not allow the trees on his property to be trimmed, and he boiled fifty eggs at a time so he could save time on cooking and eating. He ended up isolated, impoverished, and abandoned by illness and unable to paint.

But recent scholarship has taught us to distrust this account—to see it as a kind of back-formation, created by Vasari for polemical purposes. We are left with the pictures. And when we bring together—as Panofsky did, perhaps a bit too systematically—Piero's histories and mythologies, something like a set of ideas emerges from them: a set of ideas that are not entirely consistent, but that do seem to illuminate some of his other work. Consider some of Piero's subjects: the terrifying early history of humanity, in which

men who resemble Vico's giants and Pliny's monstrous races hunt and kill and, evidently, come together as friends; the story of Vulcan, god of the forge, who is thrown from Olympus, cherished by nymphs, and—in another magnificent, large-scale painting—teaches men to make tools and build houses; the story of Prometheus, who steals knowledge for man from the gods and pays a terrible price for doing so; a Renaissance palace, seen straight on and apparently complete, but surrounded by artisans and apprentices who are performing, rather than practicing, the arts and crafts needed to create such a masterpiece.

It all looks like a single, episodic work, crafted in multiple scales and over a long time: a celebratory pictorial history of human culture, which starts in fire and killing—but eventually proves able to rival nature itself, bringing forth great new things, even though these may come at a terrible price.

As early as the 1430s Alberti learned from Lucretius to fear that the world might be getting old. But the artists whose work he saw for the first time when he came to Florence in the same years taught him that his fears were unjustified. Like Lucretius himself, he realized from the artistry of his contemporaries that he was living in an explosion of creative energy:

I believed, as many said, that Nature, the mistress of things, had grown old and tired. She no longer produced either geniuses or



Piero di Cosimo: Vulcan and Aeolus, late 1480s

University of Chicago, has recently published *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, a detailed, lucid study of the ways in which fifteenth-century Italians read the newly discovered poem of Lucretius.¹ Relatively few of them, she shows, took an interest in his radical history of civilization—as opposed to his excellent trope of new Latin vocabulary words. Piero, or his informant, was reading in much the same focused, insightful way as the erudite Florentine chancellor Marcello Adriani did in his own time—and perhaps comparing the earliest times, as Lucretius described them, to the new lands to the east and west, as travelers were beginning to describe these. The question of informants—and the nature of possible conversations between painters and scholars—becomes painful here. We simply don't know where Piero's literary materials came from, or in what form he gained access to them.

It may be still possible to shed some light on the painter's mind. Vasari treated Piero as a sort of minor-league Leonardo da Vinci: eccentric, misanthropic, and inventive. Where

¹Ada Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance* (Harvard University Press, 2014); for Piero's reading and its context see also Alison Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence* (Harvard University Press, 2010), and Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

giants which in her more youthful and more glorious days she had produced so marvelously and abundantly.

Since then, I have been brought back here [to Florence]—from the long exile in which we Alberti have grown old—into this our city, adorned above all others. I have come to understand that in many men, but especially in you, Filippo, and in our close friend Donato the sculptor and in others like Nencio, Luca and Massaccio, there is a genius for [accomplishing] every praiseworthy thing. For this they should not be slighted in favour of anyone famous in antiquity in these arts. Therefore, I believe the power of acquiring wide fame in any art or science lies in our indus-

try and diligence more than in the times or in the gifts of nature.

Could Piero have been inspired, as Alberti was, by the extraordinary beauty of Florentine art and the extraordinary ingenuity of Florentine technology to devise his own visual history of human creativity?²

It seems possible. After all, one of the most stunning paintings in the

²For Piero's views on architecture and technology, see the classic essay of Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt, "The Relation of Sculpture and Architecture in the Renaissance," in *The Renaissance from Brunelleschi to Michelangelo: The Representation of Architecture*, edited by Henry Millon and Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani (Rizzoli, 1994).

National Gallery exhibition is Piero's early double portrait of the architect Giuliano da Sangallo and his father, the musician Francesco Giamberti. A powerful, sharply etched study in character—the sunken mouth and craggy profile of Giamberti may have come from a death mask—the portrait innovates in one precise way. Both men appear with the implements of their arts, Giuliano with a compass and Francesco with a sheet of music. This is the earliest Renaissance portrait to identify its subjects' callings. It's reasonable to imagine that the proud young artist who produced this marvelous celebration of two artists, father and son, might have spent much of his life developing the thoughts that they only suggest: that men make their own arts, if not their own fates.

Much remains hard to set into context or explain. Piero's strangely ceremonious image of a famous wooden crucifix in Lucca, for example, still calls out for explication. What role did such a painting play in a complicated fifteenth-century devotional life dominated by relics and images? So does his striking group portrait of the theologians who debated the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. The great nineteenth-century scholars gazed at Piero and found him hard to unravel. Their successors in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have given us a Piero we can appreciate as a master, in two senses: a master painter and a master thinker, whose ideas expressed themselves in strange and unforgettable images. The religious master, strangest in some ways of all the Pieros, awaits explication still. □

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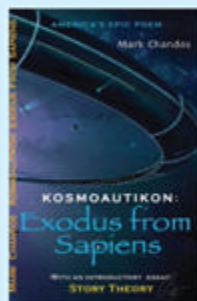
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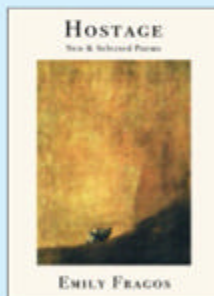
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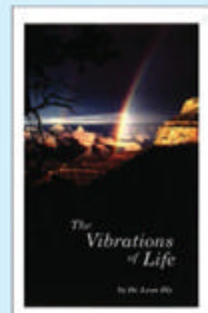
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Jihad: The Lessons of the Caliphate

Gerard Russell

The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East

by Eugene Rogan.
Basic Books,
485 pp., \$32.00

Just over a hundred years ago, in November 1914, a turbaned and bespectacled cleric stood on the exterior balcony of the great al-Fatih mosque in Istanbul. He read a fatwa that, among other things, enjoined all Muslims to fight against the British and French in a war taking place further north, in which a million men had already fallen. France, Russia, and Britain were allies. Their enemies were Germany and Austria-Hungary; and these, the Central Powers, were now being joined by the mightiest Muslim ruler in the world, the caliph Mehmet Reshad.

The al-Fatih (“Conqueror”) mosque had been built to celebrate the capture of Istanbul (then Constantinople) in 1453 by the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II and his Muslim Turkish army. After taking Istanbul the Turks had moved on westward, filling Europe—as Wordsworth put it—with “miserable fear.” That, however, was distant history by 1914. By then the Turkish Empire was in decline, having lost almost all its European and North African provinces, and had been derided as the “sick man of Europe” for sixty years. It still included what is now Turkey and the Levant—the coastlands running from Turkey to Egypt—and it claimed territory in North Africa and the Arabian peninsula. It had also one asset of potentially huge but incalculable value: Mehmet Reshad, descendant and successor of Mehmet II, was recognized by some Muslims as far east as India as their caliph, or ruler.

The cleric removed a scroll from the satin bag in which it had been placed by the Ottoman Empire’s most senior cleric, the Sheikh ul-Islam, and read the fatwa aloud to the people gathered below. It had been ratified by no fewer than twenty-nine Islamic scholars and declared binding on all Muslims around the world. Muslims must hasten, it said, with all their bodies and possessions, to fight jihad on behalf of the caliph Mehmet Reshad; if they were subjects of Russia, France, or Britain, they must wage war against those governments; if they failed to do so, they would be exposed to the wrath of God.

The fatwa sounds like the stereotype of Islam: medieval and militant. The background is more complex. The Ottoman Empire for which Muslims were summoned to fight was indeed thoroughly medieval in many ways. It contained five hundred automobiles at the end of 1913 (compared with one million in the United States); they had been legal only since 1908. The Ottoman front in World War I would involve sacred banners, cavalry charges across enemy lines, camel-back fight-



The two caliphs: Mehmet Reshad of the Ottoman Empire, circa 1917, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi of ISIS, July 2014

ing, antique rifles, and bags of gold.

Yet it had its modern aspects. The Ottoman Empire’s real rulers were not the sultan but a group of military officers called the “Young Turks.” These had reformed the Ottoman army, parts of which proved during the war to be bold and formidable. A part of the reform was the recruitment of German officers for the Ottoman navy, which was supposedly under Turkish command, but the officers were unavoidably also loyal to their own government. One of these was Admiral Wilhelm Souchon.

In October 1914, Souchon was sent into the Black Sea in charge of a small fleet of Ottoman ships, with sealed orders that he knew would commit the empire to war once they were carried out. He was supposed to wait for confirmation before opening them. Once within range of the Russian fleet in the Black Sea, without waiting for the necessary confirmation from Istanbul, he opened his orders and attacked. That was the action that committed the Ottomans to the war and led to the declaration of jihad.

Germany hoped that the jihad might radicalize the sixty million or so Muslims then living in British-ruled India, forcing Germany’s wartime enemy Britain to divert forces from Europe to contain the threat, and undermining the reliability of Britain’s 240,000-strong Indian army. The German authorities distributed Islamist propaganda. They also tried to radicalize Muslim POWs by singling them out for special treatment, and by deploying pro-Ottoman imams to persuade them to volunteer for the Ottoman army in the Middle East. There is an eerie resonance in the behavior today of ISIS recruits from such countries as France, who are following in the footsteps of these hapless Muslim instruments of the European foreign policies of an earlier era.

This foreign backing made it a rather peculiar kind of jihad. Militant as the Ottomans’ language was, they had

tried hard to stay out of the war. Furthermore, Muslim holy warriors would be acting in concert with Christian allies. Even the crowd of the faithful who attended the declaration of jihad at the al-Fatih mosque went afterward to make a friendly visit to the embassies of Germany and Austria-Hungary. The Hapsburg rulers of Austria-Hungary were the very ones who had stopped the Turkish advance across Europe some centuries before.

The 1914 fatwa’s aftermath is described in Eugene Rogan’s admirable and thoroughly researched *The Fall of the Ottomans*, which is a comprehensive history of World War I in the Middle East. The clue is in the title: the jihad did not work out as planned. A few Muslims did obey the fatwa, and fought for the Caliphate in Iraq, Egypt, and elsewhere. Most did not. Many fought for the other side. What lessons may this have for us, confronted as we are by a new claimant to the Caliphate—Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS?

The first lesson is that events in the Middle East are to a large extent determined by the region’s inhabitants, with a less central influence for outsiders than is sometimes presumed. Europe was playing with fire by stoking the jihad. Luckily, it had less power than it imagined even then to shape the Middle East. When I was learning Arabic twenty years ago, my teacher had a little joke to tell his British students. Long ago, he said, British students of Arabic just wanted to learn the imperative mood: “Join our war!” “Release our citizen!” But now, he said, in our dealings with Arabs and their governments we would need to learn other verb forms: “Please join our alliance.” “If you do this for us, we will do that for you.”

The imperative was always overused by Westerners: it still is, in every debate that presumes Western power and

responsibility to shape the Middle East. The Arabs have their own version of this misplaced belief, often presenting themselves as powerless victims of outside forces. “If it were not for the scheming of you Europeans, Islam would have conquered the world!” as a Syrian acquaintance of mine once told me.

The claim of victimhood is understandable. For a hundred years, major events in the Middle East have been reported in the West with Westerners at the center of the picture. The Arab Revolt of 1916–1918, which overthrew Ottoman rule in the empire’s Arab provinces, is often presented as the creation of the British officer and writer T. E. Lawrence. In Rogan’s book, one of whose virtues is that it is based in large part on Arabic and Turkish sources, the revolt is much more clearly the initiative of the

Arab sharif of Mecca, who proposed it to the British well before the start of World War I. Its military successes owed much to figures hardly known in the West, such as the Iraqi Jafar al-Askari and the Bedouin Auda Abu Tayi.

The best-known example of Western imposition on the Middle East is the Sykes-Picot Agreement made between Britain and France in 1916, which decided their respective zones of influence in the region in the event of victory in the war. The agreement conflicted with commitments to Arab independence separately made by the British to Arab rebels. It has become emblematic of European double-dealing and of the post-World War I order in the Middle East. “The end of Sykes-Picot” was the subject of a video released by an ISIS filmmaker in June, who demonstrated his point by stepping across the border between Iraq and Syria. Underlying this gesture is the supposition that the natural unity of the Arab or Islamic world was stymied by interfering colonialists.

In fact, as Rogan points out, the modern Middle East bears no resemblance to the Sykes-Picot map. (If anything, ISIS has restored something like the original Sykes-Picot Agreement, which allocated Mosul to Syria.) Although the Europeans did indeed betray the Arab nationalists’ hopes for a united postwar Arab state, they did so partly because the appetite for it was not as widespread as the nationalists had hoped. Subsequent attempts to unify Arab states have usually failed, and as British and French influence in the region has declined, the region has become more disunited rather than the reverse.

An allied myth, cherished by Islamists, is that Western colonial powers used their influence to suppress and undermine Islam. In fact, the opposite is closer to the truth. Europeans were attracted to the power of Islam and what they thought it could do for them. Few took a sentimental interest in the non-Muslim minorities of the Middle

East. The German kaiser, for example, was approached during a tour of the Middle East by a Lebanese Christian who asked how Germany might help his community of 300,000 Christians. “You live among three hundred million Muslims; so why not turn Muslim?” was the only advice that the kaiser offered. Europeans did not impose modern ideas on the Arab world; Arabs, until the recent rise of Islamism, adopted them by choice.

Admiral Souchon’s act precipitating the Ottoman entry into World War I is an example of how Europeans could indeed have an impact on events in the Middle East—but nothing that he did would have been possible unless it had been, broadly speaking, in line with the inclinations of at least part of the Ottoman elite. Similarly, the Arab revolt was hastened and encouraged by the presence of British warships—but Britain could never have created the revolt out of thin air, and did not think it up for itself. The West can nudge events one way or another, and provide the strong support that will encourage Arab allies to act. It cannot however decide the Middle East’s future course with a few thousand well-aimed bombs, or even a few well-chosen words.

A second lesson from this book is about jihad and the Caliphate. The Caliphate was not an institution whose rules were laid down clearly in the Koran, but instead had evolved after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Bereft of their religion’s founder, the early Muslims had elected one of their own number to take his place. Or, according to the Shia and some other Muslims, the post went automatically to the Prophet’s son-in-law. The succession was controversial from the very start, and sets apart the Shia and Sunnis to this day. Sultan Mehmet Reshad’s ancestors were ceded the title by the last Arab claimant in the sixteenth century.

The caliph was traditionally an emperor, not a pope—a temporal leader with some spiritual authority, especially the power to declare war and make peace, but mainly in respect of his own territory and subjects. As the Ottoman Empire shrank and its former Muslim subjects came under alien rule, they still looked to the sultan on matters of religion. So the role of the sultan-caliph developed an extraterritorial dimension. As trade, newspapers, and the telegraph slowly brought news of the embattled Caliphate to even the most distant Muslims, the sultan came to be acclaimed as caliph in mosques as far east as Dhaka in modern-day Bangladesh.

At times this brought Muslim minorities under suspicion of being in league with the Ottomans against their own governments. Many Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire likewise gradually came under the protection of Christian powers, unfortunately reinforcing a sense that they had divided loyalties. The decades preceding World War I saw several forced exchanges of populations in which Muslims were driven out of Europe, and Christians driven out of the Ottoman Empire. This stoked religious militancy.

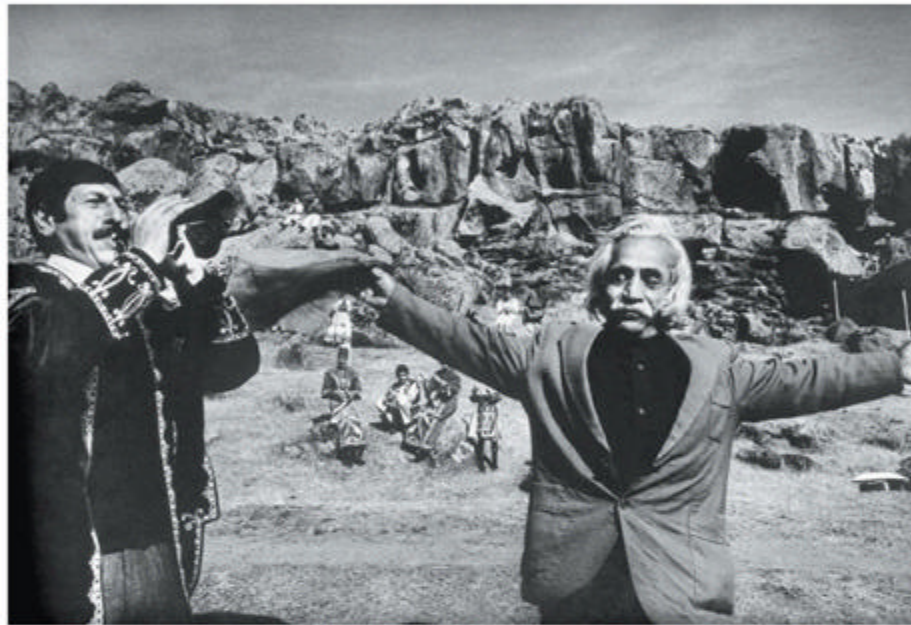
Yet as the Ottomans discovered in the bitter fighting of 1914–1918, their non-Turkish Muslim subjects—let alone Muslims from other parts of the world—were not reliable allies. One

reason was that the Ottoman claim to the Caliphate was shaky. For the first six centuries of Islam the caliphs came (or claimed to come) from Muhammad’s Arab tribe, the Quraysh. Ottomans by contrast were ethnic Turks, and had made their claim to the Caliphate with circumspection. It was a claim more keenly accepted outside the Arab world than within it. In Dhaka the Ottoman sultan was acclaimed in mosques. In Arab Baghdad, by contrast, he was the butt of ribald songs.

Many Arabs, indeed, took the opportunity of the war to rebel against the Ottomans: they preferred the rival British-backed Arab sharif of Mecca; or some had no interest in obeying anybody’s religious call to arms. The Persians and southern Iraqis, followers of

Christian Russia in the war, just as they hoped that Muslims would take their own side. They made misjudgments on both counts. Their massacres did not stop the Russian advance. Meanwhile of the more than a million Muslims who served in the British Indian army in the Middle East between 1914 and 1918, many of whom accepted the sultan’s religious authority, few defected to the Ottomans. Most, in the words of one Indian Muslim leader of the time, swerved “not a hair’s breadth” from their loyalty to George V.

Compared with the Russians, in fact, whose Communist revolution took them out of the war in 1917, the world’s Muslims proved unexpectedly immune to radicalization. As a general rule, the people of the Middle East sought to be



A man in Aparan, Armenia, honoring ancestors from the area of Sason—in modern-day Turkey—who escaped the 1915 Armenian genocide, 1998; photograph by Antoine Agoudjian from *The Cry of Silence: Traces of an Armenian Memory*, just published by Flammarion

the Shia branch of Islam, had religious reasons to reject the sultan’s authority.

World War I did set Muslims against Christians more bloodily than ever before—but not through any global jihad. The fighting was the product instead of the Ottomans’ manipulation of local grievances, racism, and religious chauvinism against a portion of their own citizens. In 1914, Ottoman-ruled Anatolia was only 18 percent non-Muslim. Now renamed Turkey, it is 99.8 percent Muslim. What came in between is known as the Armenian genocide, a controversial term that Rogan uses, though sparingly, at the end of his book. That more than 600,000 and perhaps as many as 1.5 million Armenians and other Christians (and indeed some Yazidis too) were killed is not in question.

One Ottoman governor gave the order “to exterminate all Armenian males of twelve years of age and over.” Kurdish nomads, enemies of the Armenians because of constant land disputes, were given free rein to act on old grudges. All across eastern Anatolia, men were executed and their corpses thrown into rivers or mass graves; survivors were used for forced labor; women and children were driven on forced marches across the desert. They could survive if they converted to Islam. Among the victims were members of the Assyrian Christian community whose descendants, just last year, were exposed to similar treatment from Baghdadi’s followers.

The Ottoman authorities initiated the killings not out of religious ardor but cold-blooded policy: they feared that the Armenians would side with

on the winning side, not the side of religion. When the British lost battles, the Ottomans gained recruits; when they defeated Ottoman armies, the Bedouin tribes rounded on the retreating Turks. So clear was this trend that the British invested heavily in losing battles like their increasingly desperate attempt at Gallipoli, preferring to fight on rather than accept defeat and risk the wider effect on Muslim morale.

ISIS’s leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is an Arab, and claims descent from the Quraysh; but it is likely that his support will fluctuate just as Mehmet Reshad’s did. Every defeat diminishes his appeal. Every time the anti-ISIS coalition, like the British at Gallipoli, is forced to give up overambitious campaigns against Baghdadi, his reputation and recruiting power will grow.

That is the precedent that reaches us from 1914. It is sadder to reflect on the Middle East’s lost diversity. In 1870 Muslims, Christians, and other religions lived side by side all throughout the Middle East, Anatolia, and the Balkans. They were unequal, but if the Ottomans had modernized faster, or World War I had not happened, it is just about possible to imagine that their empire might have evolved into a genuine multiethnic, multireligious state. The former Ottoman province of Egypt managed to go some way down this path, after obtaining de facto autonomy in the early nineteenth century. Between 1860 and 1930 it had three Christian prime ministers. The Arab states that emerged from the Ottoman

Empire achieved a degree of religious harmony; some still have it. Where persecutions have happened, they have proven—like their grim precedent—to bring only harm to the nations that have perpetrated them.

The Ottoman Empire surrendered in October 1918. Its land was parceled out to various ethnic minorities by the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres. But this was one more colonial map that would mean nothing in practice. An officer called Mustafa Kemal (later styled Atatürk) recruited a Turkish Muslim army, repudiated the treaty, and established the borders of modern Turkey by force. He also abolished the position of sultan in 1922, keeping only the Caliphate. Then in 1924 he abolished the Caliphate as well.

It was a controversial step. *The Economist* in March 1924 commented that Muslim minorities in countries like India and Russia might particularly lament the fall of the Caliphate because it “carries a message of salvation through an international Muslim solidarity.... We are possibly on the eve of a profound cleavage of policy within the Muslim world.” So it happened, with groups like the Muslim Brotherhood springing up in the aftermath of the Caliphate’s demise, trying to recreate it and, with it, a lost Islamic unity that had not, in fact, truly existed since the death of the Prophet nearly thirteen centuries before. Except for a brief campaign in 1924 by the sharif of Mecca (ancestor of King Abdullah of Jordan) to have himself recognized as caliph, no candidates came forward. Until, that is, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi preached to a Mosul mosque in July last year, claiming to do so as caliph of a new Islamic State.

It is hard to lament the Ottoman Empire, which slaughtered the Armenians. Nor was its treatment of its Arab subjects much milder: those who sided with the British faced mass execution. Its religious tolerance, too, has been greatly overstated. The massacres of the Armenians were not unique, but were preceded by an attack on the Yazidis in the 1890s just as ruthless as ISIS’s last year. It is tempting, though, to look back at that moment between 1922 and 1924 when the Muslim world technically had a religious leader with no political power. Might such a figurehead have provided unity to a fractured Muslim world? Might he have had the religious authority to put down upstarts like Baghdadi?

It has become common in Western circles, infused by the Whig interpretation of history, to speak of the need for a Muslim Luther to induce liberalism in Islam. The troubles of the Muslim world, however, are not those of pre-Reformation Europe, but rather of the Reformation in full swing. Hundreds of splintering congregations are seeking to suppress the accretions of popular religion, and return to the letter of the original scriptures, denouncing and warring with one another and the resurgent hierocrats of Shia Islam in Iran. Nobody speaks for all Muslims, and political power is sought on the back of religious piety. If one is to engage in the prescribing of solutions for Islam—a presumptuous excursion into the realm of the hypothetical, and to be done with due humility—then the fall of the Ottomans inspires a different thought: perhaps we should encourage our Muslim friends to seek not a Luther but a pope. □

Sensual Sappho

Edith Hall

Sappho: A New Translation of the Complete Works

translated from the ancient Greek by Diane J. Rayor, with an introduction and notes by André Lardinois. Cambridge University Press, 173 pp., \$70.00

In about 300 BC, a doctor was summoned to diagnose the illness afflicting Antiochus, crown prince of the Seleucid empire in Syria. The young man's symptoms included a faltering voice, burning sensations, a racing pulse, fainting, and pallor. In his biography of Antiochus' father, Seleucus I, Plutarch reports that the symptoms manifested themselves only when Antiochus' young stepmother Stratonice was in the room. The doctor was therefore able to diagnose the youth's malady as an infatuation with her. The cause of the illness was clearly erotic, because the symptoms were "as described by Sappho." The solution was simple: Antiochus' father divorced Stratonice and let his son marry her instead.

Plutarch's story invites us to wonder if the relationship between Sappho and erotic symptoms is entirely straightforward. Did Antiochus and his doctor learn to describe the sensations he was experiencing from their knowledge of Sappho's already "classic" love poetry? Did art shape life? Or are such sensations the universal experience of erotically fixated individuals, which would mean that lived experience had been recorded with uncanny realism in Sappho's art?

Sappho has probably had more words written about her in proportion to her own surviving output than any other writer. A couple of complete poems and about two hundred fragments are all that remain of the nine substantial books, in diverse genres and meters, that she produced on her home island of Lesbos in the northeastern Aegean around 600 BC. Her poems could be consulted, complete, in the ancient libraries, including the famous one at Egyptian Alexandria. But they did not survive the millennium between the triumph of Christianity and the frantic export to the West of Greek manuscripts from Constantinople before it fell in 1453. Some Renaissance scholars believed that in the eleventh century Pope Gregory VII had all the manuscripts of Sappho burned as dangerously salacious.

Yet Sappho, for all the meagerness of her extant poetry, is a founder in many more respects than in teaching us what love feels like. She is the first female poet and "learned woman" known to antiquity and to the "Western" literary tradition. Said to have been entitled "the tenth Muse" by Plato, she was the only woman whom ancient scholars included in the canon of significant lyric poets. Nor is it only her poems that have mattered: her life and loves have inspired plays, operas, and novels, skillfully documented in Margaret Reynolds's *The Sappho Companion* (2001). Until the nineteenth century, these biographical narratives mostly derived from Ovid's fictional letter in his *Heroides*, addressed by a suicidal heterosexual Sappho to her male lover



Portrait of a young woman often identified as Sappho; fresco, Pompeii, first century CE

Phaon. Although this tradition reached its acme in Charles Gounod's spectacular 1851 opera *Sappho*, it is still going strong—as in Erica Jong's raunchy novel *Sappho's Leap* (2003).

The change in attitudes toward Sappho's work and life came when self-conscious lesbian literary culture emerged in the nineteenth century, thanks to French decadence and Baudelaire's poem "Lesbos" in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857); Sappho was crowned as the first explicit poet of female homoerotic love. Fin-de-siècle Prussian scholars then tried to resist the growing popularity of erotic Sapphos by insisting that her relationship with the young women, whose leisure hours on soft couches she celebrated, was that of the headmistress of a finishing school to debutantes entering the marriage market. But explicitly sexy verses by Sappho found soon afterward on papyrus made the task of these prudish academics impossible.

Although Sappho is unusual as a female poet, her homoerotic stance, in the ancient setting, was unremarkable. It is found in women's songs related to goddesses' cults, for example in the songs Alcman composed for Spartan girls to sing to Artemis. Homoeroticism is also a feature of symposium poetry written by men, and the age of tyrants and lyric poetry that produced Sappho was precisely the period when the fashion for symposia—drinking parties with musical and literary entertainment imitating Anatolian palace practice—swept across the Greek world. Women held banquets at festivals from which men were excluded. There is no reason to suppose that Sappho's songs were not sung at them.

Some more recent scholars have tried to tame Sappho by turning her into a

priestess and claiming that the erotic behaviors she describes were part of formal ritual. Yet nothing has stopped Sappho from inspiring not only lesbians but heterosexual poets and poets of male homosexual love, especially C. P. Cavafy: like this gay Alexandrian proto-modernist, she seems to sing to us, as E. M. Forster described Cavafy, from a position "at a slight angle to the universe." With a single poem, which says that her beloved Anactoria is more valuable than the splendor of any cavalry, infantry, or fleet, she created a tradition of "love-not-war" lyrics whose future stretches from Propertius to Bob Dylan, John Lennon, and Bruce Springsteen. As the definitive *ur*-voice of lyric ecstasy, she is so consequential that poets of every generation, from Catullus to Sylvia Plath and Anne Carson, have used her to define their aesthetic manifestos: among the ancients, only Homer can claim an instrumental role in literary history equivalent to Sappho's.

The incomplete poem that allowed the diagnosis of the Seleucid Antiochus' symptoms is the most influential lyric poem of all time. It is usually known as "Sappho fragment 31," or "*phainetai moi*" (a transliteration of its first two words, which mean "he seems to me"). It describes a triangular scene. Sappho is transfixed by her physiological responses to watching a woman she loves laughing with a man. The brilliance of the poem—besides the luxurious specification of the symptoms—lies in the paradox that the speaker, the only silent member of the triangle, in putting her thoughts into words nearly becomes silent in death.

"*Phainetai moi*" was imitated by Catullus, the premier Roman love poet. But the Greek original has survived only because it was quoted in *On the Sublime*, the treatise on lit-

erary transcendence attributed to Longinus, writing in Greek under the Roman Empire. *On the Sublime* was first printed in 1554, and translated into English as early as 1652 by John Hall, a supporter of Cromwell. Here is the second half of Sappho's "*phainetai moi*" in Hall's version, containing the famous lines describing her physical symptoms:

*I'm speechless, feav'rish, fires
assail
My fainting flesh, my sight doth
fail
Whilst to my restless mind my
ears
Still hum new fears.*

*Cold sweats and tremblings so
invade
That like a wither'd flower I fade
So that my life being almost lost,
I seem a Ghost.*

Hall's unpretentious rhymed iambics convey well enough the force, freshness, and candor of Sappho's original. But Hall is bound by the heterosexual conventions of his contemporaries, whose picture of Sappho was derived mainly from Ovid's diva, infatuated not with the women she names in her poems—Anactoria, Gongyla—but with a man named Phaon. Hall therefore transfers to the male admirer the capacity to dart "languors" into Sappho's "ravish'd heart."

Public access to Sappho's poem was widened by Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux's French translation of Longinus (1674). Running through more than twenty editions by 1740, and published in English translation in 1711, Boileau's Longinus put sublimity at the center of literary debate and laid the foundation-stone of the invention of aesthetics as a discrete philosophical field by Burke and Kant. It also ensured that Sappho's "*phainetai moi*" would be encountered by every self-respecting writer. It has been translated or paraphrased, in English alone, by Addison, Smollett, Byron, Tennyson, William Carlos Williams, and Robert Lowell: it is the foremother of every representation of pent-up sexual desire in our cultural repertoire.

For readers who want a complete, up-to-date collection of all Sappho's extant oeuvre in faithful and cautious English translation, this new edition, by two acclaimed classical scholars, is currently the sole satisfactory option. It contains translations by Diane Rayor, a professor at Grand Valley State University in Michigan and author of reputable translations of other ancient poetry including the *Homeric Hymns* and *Callimachus*. Her Sappho translations, some of which she has been working on for more than thirty years, are presented along with carefully selected suggestions for further reading and André Lardinois's introduction and notes. Almost everything an undergraduate or interested lay reader requires to embark on a first voyage into Sappho's world can be found within this elegant volume.

National Archaeological Museum, Naples

Lardinois's contribution is exemplary—succinct, accessible, and erudite. The only dimension of Sappho's work that I miss is the hybrid "European/Anatolian" quality of her voice. In a world in which conservatives still claim the ancient Greeks as the cultural ancestors of a "superior" Western civilization, Sappho's oriental features can be helpfully disorienting.

The aristocrats of Lesbos were closely involved with the prosperous barbarian kingdoms on the mainland (now Turkey), ten nautical miles away. Sappho avers that she would not exchange her lovely child Cleis for "the whole of Lydia," i.e., the ancient kingdom that is now western Turkey; a poignant fragment describes her desolation when one girl leaves her, having contracted a marriage in Lydia. Moreover, since the decipherment of Hittite, Sappho's poetry has promised to lead us even further back, into the mysteries of Bronze-Age Anatolia. Lesbos, known to the Hittites as *Lazpas*, was already sophisticated enough to provide the Hittite king with a cult image in the fourteenth century BC. Even the name "Sappho" may derive from the Hittite word meaning "numinous," or from a Hittite name for a holy mountain.

There are several translations and editions of Sappho available, some equipped with richer biographical and interpretive discussions than Rayor/Lardinois, as well as more precise documentation about the diverse sources of her surviving poems. For this kind of information, most classicists rely on David Campbell's authoritative Loeb Classical Library *Greek Lyric Volume I* (1982). What makes Rayor's new book indispensable is her timing. She has been able to include five full stanzas of a poem by Sappho that was made public for the first time since antiquity as recently as January 2014. Even in the twenty-first century we are sometimes treated to the publication of previously unavailable ancient texts preserved on papyrus, emanating from the sands of Egypt and passing, sometimes rather shadily, through sequences of anonymous hands. The two latest Sappho poems (or rather most of one poem and a single stanza of another) were discovered just in time to be included in this collection. Until other translators can publish supplemented versions of Sappho, Rayor's volume now renders all other editions outdated.

In the nearly complete "new" poem, "Brothers Song," Sappho explores her frustration at her brothers' inadequacies. The emotional tone is unexampled in the rest of her oeuvre since the poem explores anxiety about domestic responsibility rather than sexual desire, clothing, flowers, wedding rituals, gods, or mythology. Rather than sensual, it is practical and reflective. It looks toward the future rather than the remembered past. It casts Sappho in a new light, as a capable member of an eastern Greek island family with a shipping business. One brother, Charaxos, has not returned from a voyage with his anticipated cargo; her younger brother Larichos is slow to grow up and assume responsibilities.

Sappho, exasperated and slightly desperate, rebukes an unnamed interlocutor who assails her with unsubstantiated rumors that Charaxos's return is imminent. Sappho retorts that her only option is to pray to Hera (the goddess who oversaw women's social status). This

fine poem, evoking a sustained psychological journey, is united by the image of the ship weighed down by freight and jeopardized by storms. The ship is both the vessel steered by Charaxos and a metaphor for the family's fortunes.

Rayor's translation of this poem is disappointing, even taking into account the speed with which she had to produce it. In the first line, the verb Sappho uses to describe her speech, *thruleein*, implies incessant repetition, along with a shade of disparagement that evokes gossip or tittle-tattle. But Rayor opts for the safest, and dullest, phrase, "you keep saying."

In the fourth stanza, Sappho hopes that Zeus might solve her family's problems: she reinforces her mental picture of a divinity intervening to help a struggling ship at sea, with soft bouncy waves of alliterative *b* and *p* sounds. But Rayor's pedestrian version sacrifices Sappho's aural music, producing an almost banal religious platitude:

*Whenever the king of Olympos
wishes
a helpful god to turn people away
from troubles, they are blessed
and full of good fortune.*

The Greek simply is much better than that.

Another substantial "new" poem of Sappho—fragment 58, put back together in 2004 from two separate papyri—fares much better. Perhaps the earliest surviving poem on what became a conventional theme—love viewed from a rueful, aging person's viewpoint—fragment 58 is nevertheless an unusual example. It does something difficult to achieve in Greek by giving no indication of the speaker's gender. Two and a half thousand years before Jeanette Winterson's exploration of the ungended subject in *Written on the Body* (1992), Sappho's meditative poem explored love from the perspective of a poet of indeterminate sex. Rayor preserves this unique quality and succeeds in conveying something of the "dancing iambics" around which this poem is built, which are suggestive of its central image: "knees buckle/that once could dance light as fawns."

The translation of canonical lyric poetry raises fundamental questions about what the translator should aim to achieve. Rayor states in her "Note on Translation" that her dual goal is

accuracy, guided by the best textual editions and recent scholarship, and poetry. I believe that beauty and precision in language need not be mutually exclusive.

But where does that leave the important constituents of the poetic effect?

Form, rhythm, and aural impact, and metaphor and image, are inseparable from the information transmitted in the words of a poem and can be more significant. Lyric poets are not only describing their inner lives; they are synthesizing sound, rhythm, diction, and mental pictures in order to maximize sensory and emotional impact. As Emily Dickinson said to Thomas Wentworth Higginson in 1870, "If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry."

Regrettably, the top of my head always remains in position when I read

Rayor's Sappho. Consider, for example, her scrupulously accurate translation of the "symptoms" section of Sappho's most delirious poem, "*phainetai moi*":

I can say nothing,

*my tongue is broken. A delicate
fire
runs under my skin, my eyes
see nothing, my ears roar,
cold sweat*

*rushes down me, trembling seizes
me,
I am greener than grass.
To myself I seem
needing but little to die.*

The final sentence here, while reproducing the diction in Sappho (although not the word order, in which the crucial word—"die"—comes first), offers neither idiomatic modern English nor inherent beauty.

The question is whether it is unrealistic of me to expect more. And there are some felicitous touches, such as the word describing the noise in the subject's ears—"roar." It is harsh on the ear, stronger than Hall's "hum," and less heavy-handed than the traditional translation, "thunder." But the root of the ancient Greek term, *rhomb-*, implies the sound made when a wheel or circular plate—like a top or a cymbal—whizzes around, while the prefix *epi-* suggests that the spinning sound and sensation are assaulting the speaker. Rayor's "roar" conveys Sappho's noise, but not her vertigo. Here, as often, the translator whose lexicographical homework produces the most thoughtful rendering is Josephine Balmer in her neglected *Sappho: Poems and Fragments* (1992): "my ears whistle like/the whirling of a top."

It is inevitable that Rayor has distinguished rivals, given the enormity of Sappho's cultural presence. Mary Barnard's incisive modernist renditions, first published in 1958, have never gone out of print. Other well-loved older translations, such as Willis Barnstone's, first published in 1965, have recently been revised and reissued: he excelled at conveying Sappho's most conversational idiom and her clean-cut, lapidary phrasing.

But the new millennium has already produced several new translations with something to recommend them. In *Sappho: Poems and Fragments* (2002), Stanley Lombardo harnesses authentic American speech rhythms to Sappho's powerful imagery, creating an eminently speakable modern verse idiom:

*Like the sweet apple reddening on
the topmost branch,
the topmost apple on the tip of the
branch,
and the pickers forgot it,
well, no, they didn't forget, they
just couldn't reach it.*
(fragment 69)

For Penguin Classics, Aaron Pochigian's edition, *Stung with Love: Poems and Fragments* (2009), with a dazzling introductory essay by the British poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy, offers free and rather foxy versions geared toward rhythm and sound effects:

*What farm girl, garbed in
fashions from the farm*

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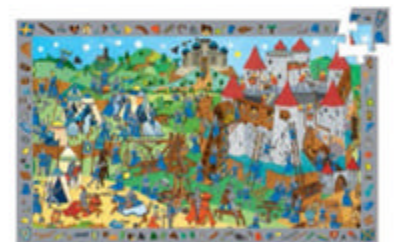
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And witless of the way
A hiked hem would display
Her ankles, captivates you with
her charm?

But no amount of new translations can obscure the sad truth that the only complete poem by Sappho we could read, until the "Brothers" poem emerged, was fragment 1, the peerless hymn summoning Aphrodite to aid Sappho's erotic pursuit of an unnamed woman. Its seven perfect stanzas survived in entirety because an astute ancient literary critic, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, specified Sappho as the best exponent in verse of what he called the "polished and exuberant" style.

This essential characterization needs to be remembered by all translators of Sappho. Dionysius explains that the "euphony and charm of this passage lie in the cohesion and smoothness of the joinery." But then Dionysius specifies the techniques by which Sappho achieves her effects: "Words are juxtaposed and interwoven according to certain natural affinities and groupings of letters." There could be no sterner challenge to a translator.

Dionysius emphasizes the connections between sounds, the most testing thing to transfer from one language to another. The sound-journey of the Greek poem Dionysius quotes hurtles the listener through four breathless, enjambed stanzas in which Sappho entreates Aphrodite for help. Aphrodite eventually responds in more measured rhythmic clusters, giving shrewd advice in sentences end-stopped simultaneously with the stanzas. What Dionysius called the "groupings of letters" are elaborate: Aphrodite favors alliterative *p* and *d* sounds (symphonious with the sound of her own name), while Sappho begins with dominant *a* sounds (there are five in the first line alone), requiring the poet, who sang her lyrics, to open her mouth wide to summon the deity from afar. But by the end of the poem, the *a* assonance has been replaced by short *e* sounds interwoven with *s*, suggesting a renewed, sibilant determination to catch the attention of Aphrodite.

This famous poem opens with an address to the love goddess, translated by Rayor as follows:

On the throne of many hues, Immortal Aphrodite,
child of Zeus, weaving wiles: I beg you,
do not break my spirit, O Queen,
with pain or sorrow...

Rayor has succeeded in duplicating Sappho's word order, syntax, and even the alternation of long and short vowels. She has faintly suggested Sappho's alliteration with a different consonant ("weaving wiles"). But her Latinate vocabulary lets her down. Words with Latin roots—"immortal" and "spirit"—tend not to translate Greek as effectively as more earthy Anglo-Saxon terms. The word "immortal" does not convey as piquantly the idea of beings who do not die as either the ancient Greek *athanatos* ("without *thanatos*") or the English "deathless" do. The noun "spirit" has associations with Christianity and disembodiment

that do not do justice to the grand Greek *thumos*—the seat of emotion and anger, felt bodily by the ancients in their lower ribcage, and better translated "heart" or "guts." But these are questions of taste: the big decision in this stanza comes with the long Greek compound adjective translated by Rayor as "on the throne of many hues."

The actual manuscript refers not to a throne (*thronos*) but an intellect (*phren* or similar), which suggests that the epithet of Aphrodite refers to her variegated *mind* rather than to her furniture. Although Rayor is following numerous scholars who have chosen to "correct" the transmitted text to what they feel is a linguistically more



Anne Carson, whose *Sappho* 'is so powerful,' Edith Hall writes, 'that it will make life difficult for any future translator'

expected reading, they are ignoring the strangeness of Sappho's eastern Aeolic dialect and her capacity for adventurous neologisms.

The other problem relates to the first half of the epithet: Aphrodite's throne, or mind, is *poikilos*. The term is synaesthetic: it can mean dappled like a fawnskin, or interthreaded like embroidery. But it also suggests oscillations or constant movement, so it can refer to the changes of note in a melody. This is where the irrepressible Anne Carson comes in. In 2002 she published her translations of Sappho, entitled for one of the poignant short fragments, *If Not, Winter*. Carson's Sappho is so powerful that it will make life difficult for any future translator. Compared with Rayor's "many hues," how much more exciting is Carson's rendition of this first address, "Deathless Aphrodite of the spangled mind"? "Spangled" really does convey the idea of patches of light and color shifting constantly.

The qualitative difference between the poetic power of Carson's versions and those of the other most recent translators is apparent just from her arresting version of the "symptoms" stanzas in fragment 31:

no speaking
is left in me

no: tongue breaks and thin
fire is racing under skin
and in eyes no sight and
drumming
fills ears

and cold sweat holds me and
shaking
grips me all, greener than grass
I am and dead—or almost
I seem to me.

Carson refuses to accommodate English usage by expanding on Sappho's bare-boned words. Greek needs fewer pronouns and articles, and Carson adds none: the sensory overload and faltering syntax overwhelm the reader or listener. In this translation, a remarkable contemporary poet and expert in

Greek magnificently rises to the challenge posed by the most celebrated woman poet of antiquity.

I would recommend Sappho novices to read Rayor/Lardinois and Carson in tandem. But even then they will not fully appreciate one crucial aspect of her status as a founder: that one of the most exquisite, and difficult, of all verse forms, the Sapphic stanza, is named after her. Sapphics consist of three eleven-syllable lines followed by a five-syllable line, with a circular movement in each line that uses long, strong sounds at both ends, framing short, fast syllables in the middle.

There can be no better introduction to the Sapphic stanza than Allen Ginsberg's nostalgic poem, in his late collection *White Shroud* (1986), celebrating the gay trysts of his youth. In a moment of genius, he pays delicate homage to his literary foremother by combining Sapphic form, sensuous diction, and pillow-talk content:

Red cheeked boyfriends tenderly
kissed me sweet mouthed
under Boulder coverlets winter
springtime
hug me naked laughing & telling
girl friends
gossip til autumn

A very few brave translators have attempted to use Sapphics in their modern-language versions of Sappho's own poems. The most successful are the work of the peerless metrician Richmond Lattimore in *Greek Lyrics* (1955).

Sappho, who still haunts and surprises us, already haunted the imagination of antiquity. The islanders of Lesbos imprinted her face on their coins. An exquisite statue of her stood in the town hall of Syracuse, Sicily. The limestone cliffs from which she was said to have plunged to her death on the island of Leukas (now Lefkada) were an ancient tourist attraction. And a poem in the *Greek Anthology* records the verses inscribed on her tomb, in the first-person voice of Sappho. She tells the visitor to her grave that she is not truly dead, since her nine books of poetry are as deathless as the nine Muses. We have lost 97 percent of those books, and yet the voice of Sappho still speaks to us with grace and authority: "You will know that I escaped the gloom of Hades, and no sun will ever rise on a world which does not know the name of the lyric poet, Sappho." □

Peter Carey's Hidden History

Fintan O'Toole

Amnesia

by Peter Carey.

Knopf, 307 pp., \$25.95

It is not hard to see Felix Moore, the supposed writer of *Amnesia*, as an alter ego of the novel's actual author, Peter Carey. Moore is a muckraking Australian journalist, but also a sometime novelist, most notably of the soon-to-be-filmed satire *Barbie and the Deadheads*. He is, throughout the book, a writer in search of a character, attempting to construct from vague and contradictory impressions a life that could inhabit his pages. He types on an old Olivetti, as Carey did in his early days. He even refers to himself, ironically, as a national treasure—a description that applies without the irony to Carey himself.

More importantly, Carey gives Moore aspects of his own biography. They seem to be roughly the same age (Carey is seventy-two). Both grew up in the wonderfully named Bacchus Marsh, a small, working-class town west of Melbourne. Moore remembers his father worrying about selling cars in his Ford dealership—Carey's own father ran a General Motors dealership, which is reimagined as Catchprice Motors in the 1991 novel *The Tax Inspector*. Moore studied science, as Carey did in 1961, at the then newly opened Monash University in a Melbourne suburb, choosing, as Carey did when he rejected the much more high-toned Melbourne University, "a university with no cloisters, no quadrangles, no suck-up colleges, no private school boys." Even the windowless hut in the rain forest, where Moore writes much of *Amnesia*, seems to recall the forest commune in which Carey himself lived in the mid-1970s.

And yet Felix Moore is something of a buffoon. He can, it is true, write a mean sentence: his rich friend Woody "peed so long and loud I knew he was showing off his prostate operation." He declares himself "our sole remaining left-wing journalist"; "a socialist and a servant of the truth." He takes pride in his mission "to be a shit-stirrer, a truffle hound for cheats and liars and crooks amongst the ruling classes." He even hazards at one point a comparison of himself to Tolstoy. But it is obvious to the reader that Felix is an unreliable narrator, not least in his heroic self-image.

The high entertainment value of the wonderfully engaging opening section of *Amnesia* derives from Felix's haplessness. He sees his "erratic and mostly unsuccessful life" as proof of his virtue in a society where only the bad are rewarded, but it also owes much to his infinite capacity to screw things up. At the beginning we find him losing a ruinous libel trial because he has, as he puts it himself, "reported a rumour" as fact. This enhances his self-esteem ("I was proud to be sued, reviled, scorned, to be called a loser by the rewriters of press releases") but it puts the reader on notice: Felix's hold on truth is tenuous—he is widely mocked as Felix "Moore-or-less-correct." It is also inadequate. The writer who appears at the start of *Amnesia* as the subject of the tabloid headline "Pants



Peter Carey in northwestern Australia, circa 2015

on Fire" will admit at the end that "as always, the omniscient narrator had a very wobbly grasp of what was happening."

Untrustworthy narrators are, of course, nothing new in Carey's novels. The prodigious liar Herbert Badgery, who spins his outlandish family saga in *Illywhacker* in 1985, is prefigured by the advertising puff merchant Harry Stanthorpe Joy in *Bliss* (1981) and followed by the hoaxer Christopher Chubb in *My Life as a Fake* (2003). But Felix is much more ridiculous than such figures—where they delight in fabrications, he is sincere in his image of himself as a brave truth-teller, even when he is revealing himself to be a liar and a coward.

Carey, moreover, goes very far in establishing Felix as a fall guy. In the opening pages, he is financially ruined by the libel trial, rendered unemployable by the exposure of his tendency to make up quotes, made homeless when he drunkenly burns his house down while following the court's order to destroy all copies of his offending book, and loses the wife he adores when her exasperation at his serial screwups finally trumps her love of his quixotic risk-taking. Thereafter, and for the rest of the book, Felix is bought, bullied, humiliated, manipulated, used, and kept in the dark. We encounter him drunk, dizzy with vertigo, locked in the trunk of a car, imprisoned in a motel, burning his hands, falling down a cliff.

All of which raises an obvious question: Why does Carey make the alter ego to whom he gives so many aspects of his own life such a hapless character? Because he needs Felix as a shield against his own earnestness. Carey

seems acutely aware that *Amnesia* is, or threatens to be, a kind of novel he hasn't written before. It is not, at heart, a fable or a fabrication or a staggering act of historical ventriloquism like *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000). The dazzling inventiveness that characterizes his best work is not attempted here.

Carey seems drawn, rather, toward an almost polemical book, a kind of hidden history of Australia in his own lifetime and, in particular, of the relationship between Australia and the United States. Two things seem clear about *Amnesia*—that Carey wants to write a directly political book and that he hesitates to do so. Hence Felix Moore—a kind of Peter Carey with some of the views that Carey wants to express but a figure of fun who is not to be taken quite seriously. Felix embodies an ambiguity that is implicit not just in his character, but in his creation.

Ostensibly, the political subject of *Amnesia* is very much of the moment. On the day of Felix's humiliation in his libel trial, another prisoner is granted bail in another court in Sydney. Gaby Baillieux, the thirty-year-old daughter of a famous Melbourne actress and her estranged husband, an MP for the Labor Party, has been charged with a sensational act of computer sabotage. She is thought to be "Angel," the super-hacker who inserted a worm into the control systems for Australia's prisons, opening all the locks. Because the Australians were using American software, the worm also acts on thousands of US prisons and jails and on black sites in other parts of the world where rendered prisoners are being held. Because of this, Gaby is apparently in danger of being extradited to the US

where she might face the death penalty. (The House majority leader, we learn, has called for her execution.)

Felix, now down and out, is approached by his old friend and "fan" Woody Townes, a wealthy property developer and veteran supporter of left-wing causes, with an enticing proposition. Woody will pay him to write a quick biography of Gaby Baillieux. Its aim will be, as Woody tells Felix, to "Australianise" her:

His role will be to properly educate the Australian public who are naturally inclined to believe the Americans are over-reaching again. Once Felix writes the story, she'll be Gaby from Coburg. She won't lose any points for pissing off the Yanks. No-one will want to hand her over.

This is an offer Felix can't refuse. It comes with a juicy advance, which will repair his financial losses. The exclusive story will make him relevant again. And if this were not enough, he has been enraptured since his days at Monash by Gaby's mother, the now famous actress Celine Baillieux, who looks like Julie Christie. Celine also wants him to write the book. And in his eagerness to comply, Felix neglects to figure out exactly which book that would be.

There are, it turns out, at least four possible versions of the story. Woody, who gradually becomes as sinister as he is preposterous, wants to control it for dark purposes of his own—Celine suspects him of working for the intelligence services. Celine wants Felix to show that her daughter is in fact innocent, that she could never have been capable of such sophisticated sabotage. Gaby, as we will gradually discover, has her own reasons for wanting the book written and her own uses for it when it has been finished.

And Felix himself, who knows nothing of the cyber underworld, is determined to project onto Gaby his own obsession with US control of Australia. He wants her not merely not to be innocent, but to be an avenging angel, deliberately at war with the US. While trying to advance his own agenda, Felix is successively controlled by the other three. Moving from Woody's clutches to Celine's to Gaby's, he becomes simultaneously a prisoner and a fugitive, constructing Gaby's character and early history from contradictory reminiscences taped by her and her mother.

Yet if this implies that *Amnesia* has something to say about the world of WikiLeaks, Anonymous, and Edward Snowden, the implication is misleading. The cyberattack that is the trigger for the action all but disappears into the novel's undergrowth. We do not, in fact, find out anything about how it was done or what its full intentions might have been. The story that Felix manages to put together stops far short of the actual attack, with Gaby still a teenager. It is rather apt that the technologies at Felix's disposal—cassette tapes and a typewriter—are

predigital. The emotional heart of the book lies in a period long before the Internet—to be precise in November 1975.

The great Australian constitutional crisis—what Felix insists on calling “the coup”—then came to a head when the unelected governor-general, Sir John Kerr, representative of Queen Elizabeth, dismissed the Labor Party prime minister Gough Whitlam and replaced him with Malcolm Fraser, the leader of the conservative opposition. (Poignantly, both men have died in recent months, giving *Amnesia* a kind of topicality Carey would not have intended.) The “coup” was preceded by a concerted campaign of disinformation and concocted scandals that weakened Whitlam’s government.

There have long been allegations that the CIA had a part in engineering Whitlam’s downfall. The Labor government had angered the US by withdrawing support for the Vietnam War, opposing nuclear weapons testing, and raising questions about the secret US-operated signals intelligence center at Pine Gap, near Alice Springs. Felix is obsessed with these events and with the alleged US role in them and determined that Gaby’s hacking be linked to them, thus dispelling the “Great Amnesia” into which they have disappeared.

He traces that amnesia back to the presence of US troops in Australia during World War II—a large section of the book is taken up with the story of Celine’s mother’s youth in Brisbane, culminating in 1942 in her rape and impregnation by an American soldier who is also a serial killer, Edward Leonski, known as the “Brownout Strangler.” (Leonski is a historical figure and Carey’s version of him in *Amnesia* follows the factual record.) Thus, Gaby carries in her blood the memory of an American crime and, as she is born at the moment Whitlam is dismissed in 1975, she symbolically inherits another.

Amnesia is not the first of Carey’s novels to have the 1975 crisis as a brooding background. It is woven into the texture of his much more substantial and formally ambitious 1994 novel, *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith*. The contrast between the two books is as stark as it is illuminating, all the more so because they share so much. *Tristan Smith*, like *Amnesia*, is a rumination on Australia’s subservient relationship to the US. The eponymous Tristan is remarkably similar to Gaby—a lost child who enters a strange imaginative world. Tristan’s mother Felicity, like Celine, is a beautiful actress who is involved with a radical theater collective. Tristan’s putative father Vincent is, like Gaby’s father Sando, a rising Labor Party operative. The relationships between Felicity and Vincent and between Celine and Sando follow similar trajectories.

Yet in *Tristan Smith* everything is oblique whereas in *Amnesia* everything is literal. The difference can be summed up as that between, on the one side, *Gulliver’s Travels* and *Tristram Shandy* (the models for *Tristan Smith*), and on the other a John le Carré thriller, whose form (though not style) *Amnesia* follows. In the earlier book, the facts of 1975 and the relationship between Australia and the US are a springboard for Carey’s daring back flip into baroque invention. In the 2015 version, those same facts are a solid but rather flat surface.

In *Tristan Smith*, Australia is called Efica and the US is Voorstand. “The

alliance between the parliamentary democracies of Voorstand and Efica is built on three areas of joint co-operation—Defence, Navigation, Intelligence—DNI.” The Labor Party is the Blue Party, the conservatives the Red Party. Tristan is born in the year 371, not, like Gaby, in 1975. Both Efica and Voorstand have cultures as strange and familiar to us as Lilliput or Brobdingnag and Carey imagines them as thoroughly as Swift delineates his islands. His writing is densely textured, the allegory rich. Yet within it the features of the 1975 “coup” are clearly present. Tristan footnotes his autobiography with explanations of the events—the concocted scandals, the VIA (Voorstand Intelligence Agency), the DoS (Department of Supply, a

OTHER THAN BLOW THE LID OFF THOSE INSTALLATIONS WHERE THE PERSONS CONCERNED HAVE BEEN WORKING AND WHICH ARE VITAL TO BOTH OF OUR SERVICES AND COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY THE INSTALLATIONS AT ALICE SPRINGS.... THIS MESSAGE SHOULD BE REGARDED AS AN OFFICIAL DEMARCHE ON A SERVICE TO SERVICE LINK....

This is not Carey’s invention or, indeed, Felix Moore’s. What we get are edited extracts from a cable of November 10, 1975, two days before Whitlam was removed from office. It is a public document: Whitlam read it into the record of



Sydney, Australia, 2001; photograph by Trent Parke from his ‘Dream/Life’ series. His latest series, ‘The Black Rose,’ is on view at the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, until May 10, 2015.

version of the Australian spy service ASIO):

The two services worked closely at all times, it sometimes being said that the DoS’s loyalty lay with the VIA, not with the elected government of Efica.

The Pine Gap facility is a “navigation cable” and “an issue which divided Eficans. Supporters of the Blue Party... felt those unexplained cables to be a humiliating invasion, a reminder of our craven servility to another power.” In some ways, the “coup” is even more deeply embedded in the emotional soil of *Tristan Smith* than it is in *Amnesia*: the key event of the boy’s life is the murder of his mother by the intelligence services.

In *Amnesia*, however, the historical facts are stripped of their protective layers of fable and fantasy and stand quite naked before us, fictionalized only to the extent that they are filtered through Felix’s unreliable and obsessional cast of mind. At times, even these fictional devices recede and *Amnesia* reads like straightforward political-historical polemic. Carey reprints parts of an editorial from the *Australian* newspaper on the thirtieth anniversary of the crisis, and extensive excerpts of a secret cable between the CIA and the ASIO, concerning Gough Whitlam’s threats to examine Pine Gap:

CIA CANNOT SEE HOW THIS [public dialogue] CAN DO

the Australian Parliament in May 1977. We are, in dealing with the relationship between factual reportage and artistic invention, a very long way from Efica.

This is, for Carey, a paradoxically bold move. He has used a “found” text before—Ned Kelly’s Jerilderie Letter is the basis for the voice Carey so brilliantly elaborates in *True History of the Kelly Gang*—but never in the polemical way that this and other documents are deployed in *Amnesia*. It is fascinating to find one of contemporary literature’s great fabricators exploring the use of raw fact. It is like meeting a famous tightrope walker ambling along an ordinary street, or a magician who makes doves disappear up his sleeve suddenly giving a talk on the anatomy of doves. Having explored so many other possibilities for storytelling, from picaresque to pastiche to hoax to allegory, Carey’s lurch toward the literal can be seen as another experiment in form.

As an experiment, though, it is only partly successful. *Amnesia* is at its strongest when the events of 1975 cast the longest and deepest shadows. “Our victory,” says Felix, “was built on the mad idea we would not be punished.” Running through much of the book is an unstated but powerful feeling that the “coup” is not just a public crisis but a private tragedy, a personal punishment for the happiness of youth. It is the moment when the hopes of a generation turn sour.

The lives of Felix, Celine, and Sando become afterlives. If they represented in turn journalistic integrity, artistic radicalism, and political idealism during the 1970s, those forces of change have atrophied. Felix has become

something of a joke and an anachronism. Celine’s marriage to Sando falls apart as she does commercials and sleeps with a conservative officeholder, and Sando becomes just another career politician. This triptych of portraits of the blighted hopes of the Australian left is suffused with a quietly affecting melancholy. Framing it is the larger question of whether all of this would have happened anyway, whether Felix’s obsession with the “coup” is not just a way of displacing onto a moment in history all the private depredations of compromise, failure, and advancing age.

It is, though, another question that undermines the novel: What has all of this to do with the ostensible subject of the book, Gaby’s sensational hacking of the prison systems in 2010? Felix is determined to connect the two events, to understand Gaby’s sabotage as retaliation for the CIA plot that somehow warped her parents’ lives. But it turns out quite quickly that’s he’s simply wrong. The whole backstory he constructs for himself and for the reader—the rape in 1942, the “coup” in 1975—seems to have no relevance whatever to Gaby’s being drawn into the hacking underworld in the early days of the Internet or her subsequent activism.

Most of the novel thus comes to seem like an act of misdirection, except that when a conjuror misdirects our attention it is in order to produce some breathtaking surprise. In *Amnesia*, there is no great trick to reveal. We never even get an answer to the question with which the book starts: Were the effects of the hack on US prisons accidental or deliberate? Felix expresses his “fear that the end will come before the end is told, that there will be no end,” and for the reader that fear proves to be all too well grounded.

This lack of connection is not just a matter of plot. It becomes a matter of voice. Gaby’s own voice is curiously absent. The story of her childhood is told by Felix but in theory there are first-person passages in which Gaby is speaking. Felix is working from her taped reminiscences and tells us that he is “transcribing lines of dialogue written as spoken” by her. But they don’t read like spoken words or indeed like Gaby’s words at all. Here, for example, is Felix’s written language in his own first-person narrative, flourishing his characteristically flamboyant similes, describing an expensive suit he has just bought:

My suit was like nothing I had ever owned. It had the faintest hint of indigo hidden in its charcoal, like a crow’s feather reflecting the sky. As I descended the rocky steps I was alive to every sense and colour. My hair thrilled on my neck.

And here is Gaby, supposedly in speech, using similar bird images, describing a teacher she wanted to befriend because she had a 1988 Mac IIx:

She had cruel-looking magpie eyes and a squishy secret sparrow heart. I did not know she was full of love and yearning and plans to change the world, so I did not let her guess how much I wanted what I wanted.

Here is Gaby again, supposedly talking about the same teacher calling at her house:

Miss Aisen called my mother's name and I was Gregor Samsa in the dark, peering through the chink below the blinds. There she was: sodium-yellow in the electric light, sun dress, wiry legs, home-made hair.

This is certainly beautiful prose, vivid, rhythmic and allusive. It is not remotely the voice of a thirty-year-old hacker. Carey's geek world is a strangely literary place. Gaby's early mentor and boyfriend does not appear to be much of a reader but uses the on-line handle "Undertoad," drawn from John Irving's *The World According to Garp*. Even when Gaby is describing computer code, she compares it to a

Montaigne essay or to Brancusi's sculpture *Bird in Space*. It might be possible to imagine that this is a deliberate strategy on Carey's part, that he is making a point about Felix appropriating Gaby's words and recasting them in his own literary voice. But if this were so, Carey would not every so often throw into Gaby's reminiscences ugly words that we know Felix does not like, little distress signals that remind us that this is indeed supposed to be a young computer geek talking: "freakerated," "disgustitude," "gasmed." The gap between "freakerated" and "sodium-yellow" is a chasm into which any real sense of Gaby's own persona disappears.

In the end, we are meant to understand that Felix's obsession with 1975

and the wound to Australian democracy is pointless. He himself comes to dismiss as "pathetic" the very belief that has shaped the book we are reading, the search for "one story, one cause, one effect." Gaby has eluded his plans to write about her and he accepts that the world has moved on from the period of the "coup":

He had been born in the previous geologic age while she was born in the Anthropocene age and easily saw that the enemy was not one nation state but a cloud of companies, corporations, contractors, statutory bodies whose survival meant the degradation of water, air, soil, life itself.

The reader of political tracts may or may not agree with this conclusion, but the reader of imaginative fiction will be unconvinced by it—not because it is necessarily untrue but because it is the "previous geologic age" that takes fire in Peter Carey's imagination. The arguer in Carey may feel that this novel is about forgetting the past that shaped Felix Moore. But the artist in Carey is not, after all, a mere Felix. Amnesia is not an option—great novels of the kind Carey has written are shaped by memory, not forgetting. The saving grace of *Amnesia* is that it does not live up to its title: the past proves to be a much more fruitful subject for its true author than the present. □

GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS

A CURRENT LISTING



Ching ho Cheng, Untitled, 1983

Shepherd/ W & K Galleries, 58 East 79th Street, NYC; (212) 861-4050; www.shepherdgallery.com; shepherdny@aol.com. Tuesday through Saturday, 10am–6pm. Master Drawings. January 23–February 21st, 2015. This year at Shepherd Gallery, our colleagues have focused on the following themes for their selection of works on paper. Crispian Riley Smith presents *Flights of Fancy*, featuring a collection of watercol-

ors of birds and animals by the leading 18th-century Dutch artist and collector Aert Schouman (1710–1792), as well as works by his pupil Abraham Meertens (1757–1823). There will also be a selection of Italian drawings including a recent re-discovery of 'An Apostle' by Giovanni di Benedetto Bandini (1540–1599) for the Cathedral Choir in Florence and a superb double-sided drawing by Giulio Benso (1592–1668). Margot Gordon presents *Five Centuries of Faces and Figures*. Works include *Two Beggars* from the Circle of Mantegna, a double-sided sheet by the 16th-century Tuscan goldsmith, Giovanni Catesi, and studies by Pietro da Cortona, Guercino, and Pietro dei Pietri, as well as a *Head of a Girl* by Gemito.



Pierre-Joseph Redouté, [Peronie Stricta], watercolor, graphite and ink on vellum, France, 1802-16. Estimate \$10,000 to \$15,000. At auction May 19.

Swann Auction Galleries, 104 East 25th Street, NYC; (212) 254-4710; Upcoming auction: *Maps & Atlases, Natural History & Color Plate Books*, May 19. This diverse spring auction includes items of particular note in each category covered. Among the map highlights are three important Dutch sea atlases by Pieter Goos, Hendrick Doncker, and Louis Renard; as well as the first printed view of Honolulu, dating from 1837, with a contemporary manuscript key by a resident missionary, that has never appeared at auction before. Important John James Audubon items include his original manuscript draft describing the *Red-Winged Starling*, while a group of remarkable 19th-century watercolors on vellum by Pierre-Joseph Redouté from a collection completed for the Empress Josephine. More info at swanngalleries.com.



David Baise, Times Square, 15" x 22" Watercolor.

American Painting Fine Art, 5118 MacArthur Blvd., NW, Washington, D.C. 20016, (202) 244-3244, classicanamericanpainting.com. Wednesday–Saturday, 11am–7pm, and by appointment. Recent Works of NYC subjects by Gallery Artists, Andrei Kushnir, Michele Martin Taylor, Barbara Nuss, Michael Francis, Chad Alan, Carol Spils, Barry Lindley,

Sara Linda Poly, Jean Schwartz, and Bill Schmidt. Paintings in oil, acrylic, and watercolor, all framed. Also: recent works in watercolor by NYC artist David Baise: *Images of Manhattan*. Our gallery is dedicated to the finest work in landscape, still life, genre, urban, and marine art by current traditional American painters, many with national reputations.



Orange Door House, 2014, 9" x 12", flashe on wood

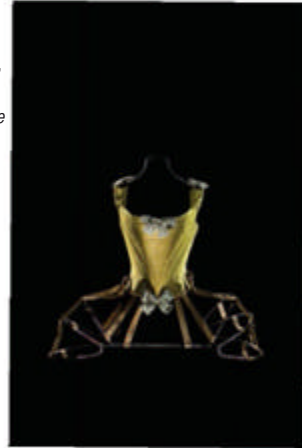
A.I.R. Gallery, 111 Front Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201. (212) 255-6651, info@airgallery.com or www.airgallery.org. Wednesday–Sunday 12pm–6pm. Ann Schaumburger: *One, Six, Twelve, Twenty*. Opening reception Thursday, April 2, 2015. Exhibit runs from April 2 through April 26.

Alexandre Gallery, 41 East 57th Street (at Madison Avenue), 13th Floor, New York, NY; (212) 755-2828; inquiries@alexandregallery.com. www.alexandregallery.com. Tuesday through Friday, 10am–5:30pm and Saturday 11am–5pm. Emily Nelligan, Marvin Bileck. Through May 9. Upcoming: African-American Masterworks from the Merrill C. Berman Collection. May 14 through June 26.



Emily Nelligan, 12 OCT 11 (4), charcoal on paper, 7 1/4" x 10 1/4"

Bard Graduate Center Galleries. 18 West 86 Street; (212) 501-3023; bgc.bard.edu/gallery; Tuesday through Sunday, 11am–5pm, Thursday to 8pm; On view through July 26: *Fashioning the Body: An Intimate History of the Silhouette*, examines the extraordinary ways in which women and men have shaped their bodies into distinctive silhouettes in the name of fashion. In the Focus Gallery through July 19: *The Interface Experience: Forty Years of Personal Computing* presents the history of computer technology through tactile and interactive displays that will stimulate new questions about how we interact with and use computers.



Whalebone stays France, ca. 1740–60. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, département Mode et Textile. Articulated pannier with hoops, France, ca. 1770. Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, dépôt du Musée de Cluny—Musée national du Moyen Âge. Photographer: Patricia Canino.

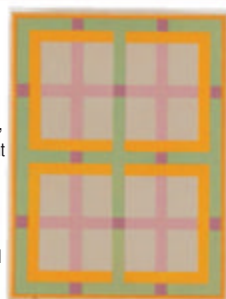


NASA, raku porcelain, life-size

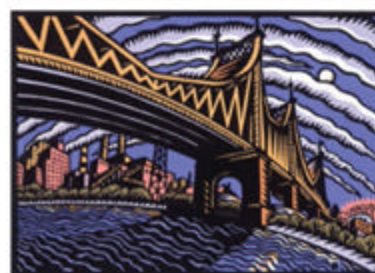
The District Gallery, 740 E. 3rd St., Los Angeles, CA; (213) 814-7164; www.districtgallery.com; arts-districtla@gmail.com; Wednesday through Sunday, Noon to 6pm; April 30 to June 12, 2015, *The Past Re-tooled, The Present Rebooted*. The exhibit surveys 50 years of Carlton Davis's art. The 28 works in the show trace his interests in drawing, his experiments manipulating light and shadow through painted wire to create two sided images, his homage to the long tradition of artists who worked in a variety of media and his use of print media and other ephemera. In a recent interview, Davis said, "My art is the residue from the collision of concepts changed by knowledge, means, material, and action. I love to explore visual thinking – to draw, to study the past masters,

to play with ideas and different media—and to write and see what surprising results develop. Old work is altered by new ideas. New work is informed by old concepts." District Gallery is a project of Los Angeles Downtown Arts District Space (LADADSpace), building an Arts District Center for the Arts and dedicated to promoting urban LA artists and preserving the Arts District as a true creative community. More at ladadspace.com.

The Drawing Room, 66 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, NY 11937, (631) 324-5016, www.drawingroom-gallery.com. Winter hours: Friday and Saturday 10am–5pm; Sunday 11am–4pm, and by appointment. VINCENT LONGO: *paintings*, ELAINE GROVE: *sculpture*. March 14, 2015–April 27, 2015. Concurrent exhibitions feature recent works by two acclaimed artists from Long Island's East End, VINCENT LONGO: *paintings*, and ELAINE GROVE: *sculpture*. In his paintings, Vincent Longo explores the energy and symmetry of the grid, creating improvisational yet structured abstractions through painterly latticework, radiant color, and a timeless sense of ornamentation. Elaine Grove's sculptural assemblages emerge from the touchstone of classic constructivism, marrying the found object with an internal logic that is immediate, poetic, and rooted in history—both of the arts and of the artist.



VINCENT LONGO Lattice Window, 2005 acrylic on wood 12" x 9" photography by Jenny Gorman



Queensborough Bridge, 2006, 5 color wood and linocut, 8" x 11" BASCOVE

"To the City's Bridges, Billets-Doux"—*The New York Times* "High-colored descriptions of complex geometric structures... like Joseph Stella on an acid trip"—*Art in America*. Catalog available. On view through July 12.

Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Noble Maritime Collection. 1000 Richmond Terrace, Staten Island, NY, (718) 447-6490. noblemaritime.org. Thursday through Sunday, 1pm–5pm, *BASCOVE/BRIDGES: Transporting the Metropolis*. Over 30 paintings and works on paper celebrating the Bridges of New York City, from 1995 to the present, by painter and printmaker A. Bascope.

How We Got to Where We Are

Fritz Stern

The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century

by Jürgen Osterhammel,
translated from the German
by Patrick Camiller.
Princeton University Press,
1,167 pp., \$39.95

In 1903, in his *Maxims for Revolutionists*, George Bernard Shaw wrote, “The reasonable man adapts himself to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.” In his stunning book on the history of the nineteenth century, the German historian Jürgen Osterhammel suggests a different approach: the unreasonable Osterhammel set himself a seemingly impossible agenda, the reasonable historian executed it, and the combination yields a great work.

It may well have seemed unreasonable for Osterhammel, at the beginning of his career, to turn to Asia as his principal field at a time when German (even European) historians had no great interest in Asian history. Germans were still overwhelmingly concerned with their own history and in fact had huge trouble fitting German experience into European history. As he writes, moreover, he indulges in his book in “personal idiosyncrasies such as a special interest in animals, the opera, and the old-fashioned...field of international relations.” In fact, reasonable or not, he pursued one of the most ambitious subjects a historian could undertake: an account of the entire history of the globe during the nineteenth century.

As it turned out, he received Germany’s most prestigious and well-endowed prizes for a work of some 1,500 pages that, against all odds, became a literary and popular success, with some 25,000 copies of the German text sold in the first year. We now have an excellent English translation with translations underway into Chinese, Polish, French, and Russian. Osterhammel has written one of the most important, consequential works of history to appear in the post-cold war era. It, has, rightly, been called an instant classic.

Osterhammel was born in 1952 and his conventional early education was deepened by private reading of such writers as Nietzsche and Bertolt Brecht. As a university student he chose to learn Chinese; for two years he studied at the London School of Economics, and from 1982 to 1986 he was deputy director of the German Historical Institute in London, deputy to Wolfgang Mommsen, a wide-ranging and original scholar and one of Osterhammel’s early mentors. Altogether he spent six years in London, seeing it as still the heart of the British Empire, a truly global entity, which holds a special fascination for Osterhammel. For two years he taught at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva.

His earliest works dealt with British imperialism and Chinese history, but his special gift appeared early in



‘Twelfth-Night Cake for Kings and Emperors’; French lithograph, 1898

two extraordinary essays on Alexander von Humboldt and on Joseph Schumpeter and Max Weber. In the latter, he quoted Schumpeter’s praise of Weber and “his mastery of immense armies of concrete facts”—a description that can also apply to Osterhammel himself. These portraits show his affinity with earlier great historians who were willing to see history on a world scale.

Osterhammel’s first major work, entitled *The Disenchantment of Asia: Europe and the Asiatic Realms in the 18th Century* (1998), dealt with the ways in which Enlightenment writers—he calls them “heroes”—constructed historical accounts of faraway places from the reports of intrepid travelers. The title evokes Weber’s work and in fact Osterhammel’s oeuvre is Weberian in breadth and insight. As he shows, the Enlightenment philosophes he discusses had no use for the earlier writers who referred to the world outside Europe as “the other.” The latter approach, he writes, combined arrogance and ignorance, reducing the knowledge of Asia to tales of “oriental despots” and their harems.* The book antici-

*Osterhammel acknowledged that Edward Said’s *Orientalism* had been the chief inspiration of his work, but later he distanced himself from Said and the extravagance of his admirers. Osterhammel’s assessment of the scholarly work of others has always been generous, even when he is politely polemical, as in a review of Niall Ferguson’s fashionable *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (2011) in *Die Zeit*, January 16, 2012.

pates Osterhammel’s later work in its precise style and persuasive originality. Osterhammel took as special inspirations the work of Edmund Gibbon and Alexis de Tocqueville, masters of lucidity.

During the last few decades, as we have become more and more conscious of living in a globalized world, historians have tried to explore and explain how it came about, and Osterhammel is well aware of their works, including Eric Hobsbawm’s three volumes about the development of modern society during his “long nineteenth century,” from 1789 to 1914. Osterhammel also pays particular attention to the work of Sir Christopher Bayly. He is well aware of the dream of composing a universal history. The Nestor of modern historiography, Leopold von Ranke, having written some sixty tomes on various aspects of European history, turned in his mid-eighties to writing universal histories.

Osterhammel lists the qualities that a global historian must have: “A feel for proportions, contradictions, and connections as well as a sense of what may be typical and representative; and second, to maintain a humble attitude of deference toward professional research.” He himself has these qualities and he devised his own original strategy for tackling the global history of the nineteenth century. He brings to this effort remarkable synthetic power and a prodigious mastery of the huge literature. He offers not a great narrative, but instead a carefully constructed mosaic, or what he calls “successive or-

bital paths” through a vast collection of materials.

He begins with “Approaches,” three chapters devoted to the self-reflections of the nineteenth century: how it documented itself in its works of literary realism, its archives, its museums, and its use of new inventions, like photography. He considers the effect of new standardized ways to tell and keep time, and the effect of the discovery of little- or hardly known regions, for example in parts of Africa and Asia, that had to be named and often settled. He notes in passing that the people who had lived in the nineteenth century are now all dead, even Harriet, the giant tortoise that in 1835 may have made the acquaintance of young Charles Darwin in the Galápagos Islands; she died in 2006 at the age of about 175. Osterhammel loves telling sometimes obscure facts, and the book is full of them; he refers at one point to what he calls “controlled play with associations.”

In these early chapters he defines the nineteenth century, as he conceives it, as beginning with the great political revolutions of the late eighteenth century, the American and the French revolutions, as well as the revolution of Haitian slaves in Santo Domingo, which for the slaveholders in the American South and the Caribbean was a terrifying event. He acknowledges his own fascination with the history of the American republic, and his reflections on slavery and on the fate of the emancipated blacks in America are strikingly nuanced. For example, he describes how after the Civil War “racist ostracism built on white supremacy appeared in place of the repressive racism of slave society,” as new racial theories developed in both the United States and Europe: “Slavery was replaced by white supremacy, and state or nonstate violence enforced privileges for groups defined by nothing other than their skin color.”

The next part of the book, entitled “Panoramas,” contains eight chapters on how peoples in Europe, Asia, and Africa lived, prospered, and suffered, what they accomplished and at what price, how the great empires were governed, and how European models prevailed or were transformed in different cultures. (The titles “Approaches” and “Panoramas” suggest mountaineering, and in a way the book is a long climb with changing and unexpected vistas.) During this period, the mobility of populations was unprecedented, as in the migrations to North America and to penal colonies in Australia and elsewhere. People had to adjust to vastly increased urbanization, though around the world agriculture remained the principal activity.

They clashed at frontiers, for example in South Africa, where British settlers defeated the Zulu people in 1879, after a conflict that Osterhammel carefully analyzes. He shows that the principal polity remained the empire, whether Chinese, British, French, or other, and not yet the nation-state. Imperial expansion posed questions about the relations between imperial centers

and their peripheries (mostly settler lands). One landmark, formerly much noted and now often forgotten, was Lord Durham's report to Parliament in 1839 about British North America and what he saw as the proper relations between the imperial center and colonies demanding some measure of autonomy. The report was "a milestone in the constitutional history of the empire [and] one of the most important documents of global constitutional history." In conceding that colonies such as Canada would form their own political identities, it argued that the "distributions of powers and responsibilities between the Whitehall-appointed governor and local representative bodies should be continually renegotiated."

Osterhammel makes some unexpected comparisons, as when he discusses the unsuccessful revolutions in Europe of 1848–1849 and describes the dangers that were made evident in

the Taiping uprising in China during the same years: "The brutality that the Taiping showed toward their enemies, and the exterminatory impulses with which these responded, were without parallel in the history of the nineteenth century." Osterhammel wants to make it clear that although after Napoleon Europe enjoyed a century without large and catastrophic wars, brutality marked much of the period. Between 1750 and 1913, about 300,000 European and North American soldiers died in battle; they were but a tiny fraction of indigenous populations that were killed, notably native Americans who encountered the brutal onslaught of the white man with his superior arms. Genocide was committed in Germany's suppression in 1907 of the Herero tribes in South-West Africa, today called Namibia. "It was not," he writes, "in 'the

EARLY ONE MORNING

Here is Memory walking in the dark
there are no pictures of her as she is
the coming day was never seen before
the stars have gone into another life
the dreams have left with no sound of farewell
insects wake flying up with their feet wet
trying to take the night along with them
Memory alone is awake with me
knowing that this may be the only time

ONCE LATER

It is not until later
that you have to be young

it is one of the things
you meant to do later

but by then there is
someone else living there

with the shades rolled down
how could you have been young there

at that time
with all that was expected

then what happened to
the expectations

there is no sign of them there
a shadow passes across the window shade

what do they know in there
whoever they are

—W. S. Merwin

MOTHER'S DAY & GRADUATION GIFT IDEAS
THE Reader's CATALOG



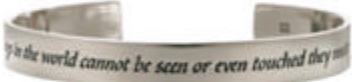
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"now voyager sail thou forth to seek and find" from *The Untold Want* WALT WHITMAN • #05-LW02C • \$99.50
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logic of colonialism' to murder the colonial subjects. They could be and were used for labor." But murder raged in many frontier regions, conspicuously in the American West, and Osterhammel gives powerful accounts of what occurred. He also gives critical attention to Frederick Jackson Turner and his theories about the frontier's effect on American democracy, which in Osterhammel's view tried to explain too much.

For Turner, "the efforts of the pioneers had formed a special national character; the peculiar egalitarianism of American democracy had its roots in the common experience of life in the forests and prairies of the West." Yet Osterhammel points to the limits of this thesis. The West, he writes, "cannot be reduced to a simple opposition of ranchers and Indians." If Turner's ideas persisted, Osterhammel argues, it is partly because historians have clung to his belief in American exceptionalism. "If the frontier evaporates, then at least that claim to a special American way goes by the board."

But the greatest horror of that century was the fate of slaves who had been transported mostly in European ships under the vile conditions of the "middle passage." From the early seventeenth century onward 12.5 million slaves embarked from Africa, of whom only 80 to 90 percent survived the trip. Those who did then had to endure the ordeal of slavery in Europe's Caribbean colonies and on the plantations in the American South.

In 1807, Britain, under pressure from parts of its own population, outlawed the slave trade, "that monumental

crime," and the all-powerful British navy enforced this decision. In Britain's own periods of repression, as in its response to the Indian mutiny of 1857, it resorted to the most appalling violations of decency.

Osterhammel's long account of the Pax Britannica is remarkably balanced but his characterization of British self-regard hits hard on the delusory British self-image:

The (male) Briton thought his superiority to lie in the art of conquest, in commercial success, and in the benefits that British rule brought to all who came into contact with it. He was superior not only to colored peoples, who were in need of disciplined and civilizing leadership, but also to European peoples, none of which acted overseas with anything like the felicitous touch displayed by the British.... The idea that the British were a tool of Providence for the betterment of the world became a kind of ground bass among sections of the population whose gaze was directed beyond their own local sphere.

In the last part of his book, "Themes," Osterhammel examines at still greater depth and length issues such as the new networks of trade, for example the international rice trade in Southeast Asia that emerged after 1800, the spread of knowledge, the emergence of English as a world language, the rise of universities, the fate of religion, and the flawed assumptions, particularly in Europe,

of a civilized world from which large numbers of people, partly by the rise of racism, are excluded. The nineteenth century "was an age of asymmetrical efficiency growth," he argues, calling attention to the relative efficiency of armed forces when compared to cultural institutions. This led to "greater control of state apparatuses over their own population."

As the functions of the state grew, it "began to develop into a new Leviathan, but one that did not necessarily have to be a monster." In his chapter "Energy and Industry: Who Unbound Prometheus, When, and Where?" Osterhammel examines how, when, and where the industrial revolution took place. He emphasizes the vast increase of fossil-fuel energy (with industrial uses of coal and the invention of the steam engine) and he describes the costs of the "satanic mills," the inhuman conditions of early industrial life. "No economic system," he writes, "has ever reshaped nature more drastically than the industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century." Among the revolutionary changes in transportation, none was more important than the railroad and the construction of bigger and better ships. Then the world was brought closer together by the transatlantic cable and by telegraphy. Domestic life became better and longer, i.e., with the "democratization" of a long life" brought about by preventing disease and by providing better nutrition and hygiene.

Liberalism is a central concern of Osterhammel. It was, he writes, "the most influential political theory of the time," seeking to control the growing powers of the state, and in many parts of the world systems of accountability gradually replaced the arbitrary imposition of individual power. But nineteenth-century liberalism, he writes, neglected "the social question," how people actually fared in everyday life. The rise of socialist ideas brought some improvements in the lot of the working class. These changes came about partly as a result of convictions, partly out of fear of working-class rage. Osterhammel rightly observes that the character of a society is revealed in how it "treats its weaker members: children, old people, the disabled, and the chronically sick."

Osterhammel gives some substance to the elusive term "modernity." For him, it involves a worldview including science, technology, and reforms of political organization. We are told how the Japanese under the Meiji Restoration became "the star pupils of Western modernity." Some countries drove themselves into modernity and became great powers, while others, especially China, sank into stagnation. The Latin American nations, once having achieved independence, adapted some European institutions: Bolivia went through twelve constitutions.

How does this European cosmopolite, so aware of the violent truths of the nineteenth century, come to judge what for many decades we came to see as the rise of Western civilization? Osterhammel quotes Gandhi's oft-cited but not authenticated quip: when asked about Western civilization, he replied, "It would be a good idea." Indeed it would be! But the West has betrayed so many of its promises that "a deep mistrust of Europe" holds sway today and its deficiencies, Osterhammel

writes, are widely known everywhere, not least among them that "every sixth person on the earth is persistently undernourished."

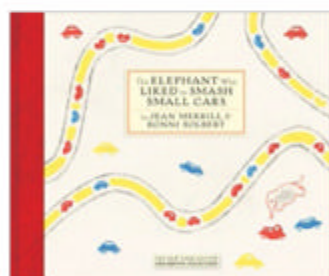
The nineteenth century left unresolved some of the deep issues regarding life within and among nations in the swiftly changing forms of what is called "modern." In separate chapters Osterhammel asks how religion, disbelief, and tolerance each fared. He shows that racism, including anti-Semitism, continued to inject its fatal poison into the body politic of the United States and many European countries. Conflict between classes was met by contradictory answers ranging from democratic socialism and its nemesis, Leninism, to right-wing nationalistic programs. It was left to the twentieth century to see how utterly brutal and dehumanizing the world could become. The tendencies formed in the nineteenth century ended in larger genocides, in state-driven murder and gulags. After World War II, some humane solutions were institutionalized, such as the welfare state in parts of Europe. It was, Osterhammel observes, replaced in many nations by mind-boggling versions of Social Darwinism, in which the ultra-rich swimming on top of a sea of corruption were hailed as the truly virtuous and creative citizens.

Osterhammel conveys extraordinary amounts of new knowledge and summarizes the revolutionary changes of that globalizing century in dazzling small fragments. He aims at presenting the "portrait of an age" through a variety of developments in government, technology, and much else. We soon see that these fragments can be fitted into a jigsaw puzzle that readers need to construct for themselves. Osterhammel allows that individual chapters can be read independently. In any case, the reader's task is lightened by his simple, direct style and by the many signposts to relevant work he plants along the way. For scholars or for the inquisitive layman Osterhammel offers a bibliography of a hundred pages of relevant material in English, German, French, and Dutch.

In spirit, Osterhammel is a son of the Enlightenment. Not only does he admire the great writers, among them Montesquieu and Gibbon, but he shares their characteristic audacity. Like his forebears, Osterhammel is an unobtrusive stylist, whose telling phrases and witticisms anchor his points in one's memory. How rare and refreshing to have historic complexity mixed with a bemused sense of *la comédie humaine*. Rare too is the quiet self-questioning that marks his work. It reminds me of the work of Albert Hirschman and of Hirschman's claim that in considering one aspect of social causation after another he was sometimes subverting his own ideas. In fact Osterhammel and Hirschman shared common intellectual ancestors and passions—and the absence of any reference to Hirschman in Osterhammel's work is puzzling.

Osterhammel prospered in a characteristically modern setting of global scholarship: he began his book in 2002 at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study. And for the sake of full disclosure let me add that I met him at that idyllic refuge and was instantly impressed by his all-pervasive curiosity,

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—Julie Danielson, *Kirkus*



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erudition, and fair-mindedness. I met as well his wife, Sabine Dabringhaus, a distinguished Sinologist, and their truly remarkable son Philipp.

In sum, this classic book should be indispensable reading for histori-

ans and for politically curious world citizens everywhere. It could make us better, more capacious citizens, more aware of the world we live in. One finishes it with awe and gratitude—as well as a touch of fatigue and, in my case,

with a question that haunts me: Who but the author is truly qualified to review this work?

But Osterhammel leaves us with a different message: “This book has attempted a piece of impossible . . . global

history. In the end, both reader and author should return to particular concerns, not soar upward into even more ambitious generalizations.” Correct, but his universal view will illuminate our particular concerns. □

The Deadly Art of Double Deception

Jon O. Newman

For years I wondered whether the ingenious premise of Agatha Christie’s “The Witness for the Prosecution” influenced John le Carré to use the same premise in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*. So I asked him, and he replied. But first the facts.

“Witness,” written in 1924, is a short story of just twenty-six pages. Leonard Vole is on trial for murdering an elderly woman whose will makes him the principal beneficiary. The woman’s maid reports, and ultimately testifies, that she heard a man speaking with her employer at 9:30 PM on the night of the murder. Leonard tells his solicitor that he returned home that night at 9:20 PM, and that his wife can verify the time, providing him with an alibi.

Questioned by Leonard’s solicitor, the “wife,” Romaine Heilger (called Christine in Billy Wilder’s film version, starring Marlene Dietrich), states that she is an Austrian actress and that they are not married. She astonishes the solicitor by saying that Leonard returned home at 10:20 PM the night of the murder with blood on his coat and confessed his guilt.

On the eve of the trial, the solicitor receives a letter telling him to come to a rented room where someone has evidence that Romaine’s account is false. Accepting the invitation, he meets a mysterious woman who hands him a letter in Romaine’s handwriting. The letter, addressed to “Max,” her “Beloved,” says that she will have her revenge on Leonard by testifying that he came home that night with blood on him and confessed to the crime. “I shall hang him, Max.”

At trial Romaine repeats her damning accusation and steadfastly repeats it on cross-examination. Leonard’s barrister then produces her letter, which totally discredits her testimony. She breaks down on the stand, confesses to her lies, and confirms Leonard’s alibi.

With the accusation of the principal witness undermined, the jury quickly comes to the conclusion that Vole is innocent and acquits him. Afterward Leonard’s solicitor sees Romaine and realizes that, in disguise, she was the woman who handed him the fake letter. She explains her ploy: “I know something of the psychology of crowds. Let my evidence be wrong from me, as an admission, damning me in the eyes of the law, and a reaction in favor of the prisoner would immediately set in.”

The solicitor, appreciating the ploy, says he sees that Romaine knew Vole was innocent. “You do not see at all,” she replies. “I knew—he was guilty!”

The story originally ended at that point, but, responding to protests that a guilty man should not get away with the crime, Agatha Christie added a new ending. Vole abandons Romaine, who promptly retaliates by killing him right in the courtroom. The play and the film end the same way.



The premise that undermining an accusation will induce a court to believe that an accused person is innocent is not grounded in logic. Although an accuser is lying, for whatever motive, the defendant may nonetheless be guilty. But the jury in “Witness” jumped to the conclusion that the defendant was innocent, exactly as Romaine had hoped.

Thirty-nine years later in *Spy*, Alec Leamas, the spy who had hoped to come in from the cold, is dispatched to East Germany, believing that his final mission is to destroy Hans-Dieter Mundt, chief of East German counterespionage, by making what Leamas believes is the false accusation that Mundt is a double agent working for British intelligence. Unbeknownst to Leamas, Mundt really is a double agent.

Leamas’s mission is orchestrated by le Carré’s famous spymaster, George Smiley, who initially takes several steps to provide credibility for Leamas’s accusation. First, Smiley creates the impression that Leamas left his job with British intelligence under a cloud, suspected of financial irregularities. “In the full view of his colleagues he was transformed from a man honourably put aside to a resentful, drunken wreck.” A job is arranged for him at a library where, as Smiley anticipated, he meets and becomes romantically involved with Liz Gold, the secretary of a Communist cell in London. Leamas commits a minor assault intended to land him in jail. Upon his release, he is approached by an East German agent who begins the process Smiley anticipated of recruiting Leamas to become

a defector. Ultimately Leamas appears as a witness before an East German secret tribunal, where Mundt has been put on trial on the accusation of Mundt’s deputy, who has become suspicious that Mundt is a double agent.

Unbeknownst to Leamas, Smiley has carefully created grounds for showing that Leamas is lying when he testifies against Mundt and has made sure that German intelligence becomes aware of these grounds. The key basis for discrediting Leamas is bringing Liz Gold (called Nan Perry in the film version) before the tribunal. She testifies that after his release from prison Leamas told her there was something he had to do, someone he had to get even with, and when it was over, he would come back. She also testifies that a man named Smiley came to her apartment after Leamas left and assured her that “friends” would pay her rent, all of which confirmed that Leamas remained in the employ of British intelligence and was falsely accusing Mundt.

His accusation undermined, Leamas realizes that Smiley had planned the whole thing to save his double agent and tries to save Liz by admitting to the tribunal, “It was an operation, a planned operation.”

After learning that British intelligence has orchestrated Leamas’s accusation that Mundt is a double agent, the tribunal comes to the opposite conclusion—Mundt is a loyal East German officer. Mundt then arranges for Leamas to go over the Wall back to West Berlin and pretends to do the same for Liz Gold. But she is shot and killed climbing the wall, and Leamas, disillusioned,

chooses not to come in from the cold, climbs down, and is also shot and killed.

The structures of the two stories are not identical. In “Witness” the plot to mislead the tribunal by undermining an accusation of guilt is conceived by the witness herself. In *Spy* the plot is conceived by the witness’s superior, with the witness unwittingly used as a pawn. In “Witness” the witness knows her accusation is true but wants a jury to believe she is lying. In *Spy* the witness, who also believes his accusation is true, wants a tribunal to believe him. But the premise of the two plots is the same: showing that an accuser is lying will induce a belief that the opposite of the accusation is true.

Three years ago I wrote to le Carré and asked “whether you had Agatha Christie’s premise in mind when you wrote *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, if not, whether you thereafter became aware of the use of the premise in the earlier work, and in any event, whether you are aware of the use of this premise in other works of fiction.”

I added, “Having presided over many criminal trials in eight years as a trial judge and read many trial transcripts in thirty-two years as an appellate judge, I have seen many accusations attacked but never by use of a preplanned basis to discredit the accusation with the result that the jury believes the opposite of the accusation.”

The reply from le Carré included the following:

Your question has been put to me before, and I have tried to answer it honestly. I did indeed see the Agatha Christie play, but I have no idea whether it was before or after I wrote *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, nor whether the device of entering a witness in order to discredit him could have been in my head when I came to write the novel. But I am sure that the notion did not consciously present itself to me during the short and turbulent time of writing. I think there are a whole bunch of influences that kick around in one’s head at such a time, and one draws on them because they are apposite, often without recognizing where they come from. Maybe that happened in this case, though I am inclined to doubt it. I had, for a short time in my life, been close to all manner of deceptions, and the process of inside-out thinking was very familiar to me!

I thank you again for writing.

Yours sincerely,
John le Carré

LETTERS

A DOOR FOR CATHOLIC WOMEN

To the Editors:

In Eamon Duffy's otherwise very well-informed "Who Is the Pope?" [NYR, February 19], he remarks that "He [Pope Francis] has made clear his belief that Pope John Paul II's 1994 apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (Priestly Ordination) has settled 'definitively' the question of women's ordination—that door is closed." And "so, it was asked, how did Papa Wojtyła know that the ordination of women was impossible...?"

Ordinatio Sacerdotalis deals only with the question of women's ordination to the *priesthood*. This is an important distinction because it does NOT deal, in any way, with women's ordination to the *diaconate*—female deacons exist in the New Testament (Romans 16:1–2), in the Anglican Church, and, closer to Rome, in the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Orthodox Church of Greece, where these orders are considered valid.

While Saint John Paul may have "definitively" spoken on not ordaining women to the priesthood (*Ordinatio* ¶4 §2), neither he nor Benedict XVI—nor for that matter Francis—have said that women cannot be ordained to the *diaconate*: this is very much an open question (cf. *Women Deacons: Past, Present, Future* by Gary Macy, William Ditewig, and Phyllis Zagano, Paulist Press, 2011), and one worthy of further discussion.

Kevin Di Camillo
Haledon, New Jersey

SLEEPWALKING WITH BOB DYLAN

To the Editors:

Leaving aside Dan Chiasson's dubious conclusion that the shortcomings of Bob Dylan's work in the 1980s can be attributed to the musicians with whom he worked, I find it ridiculous that he stigmatizes Jerry Garcia and Tom Petty as "minor talents" ["Prodigal Bob Dylan," NYR, February 19]. Dylan also collaborated with Roy Orbison and George Harrison in the 1980s. Perhaps Chiasson also considers them to be insignificant. Within the rock idiom that Dylan embraced, all were major figures. Garcia, Orbison, and Harrison are no longer with us, but Tom Petty remains as the leader of the last great American rock band and the writer of a large, first-rate body of durable, inspiring, culturally astute songs.

Rick Holmes
Thunder Bay, Ontario

Dan Chiasson replies:

I'm glad that Jerry Garcia and Tom Petty have such passionate and knowledgeable defenders, and there's no disputing taste. I think they are minor in relation to Dylan, though compared with other radio acts of that era—ZZ Top and Wang Chung, for example—they do seem like great geniuses. Roy Orbison and George Harrison are indisputably major, but when was the last time you cranked a Traveling Wilburys tune? That was a lifeless, sleepwalking ensemble, and you know who I blame? Tom Petty.

VOTING ON THE OX

To the Editors:

In "Is the Right Choice a Good Bargain?" [NYR, March 5], Michael Walzer asserts that "statistical groups do especially well in answering factual questions," and refers to an article of Francis Galton ("Vox Populi," *Nature*, March 7, 1907) to support the claim. The phrase Walzer puts in quotes—"The ox weighed 1,198 pounds; the average estimate... was 1,197 pounds, more accurate than any individual's guess"—is nowhere to be found and completely subverts Galton's main point.

Galton didn't even bother to compute the average of the 787 contestants who tried to estimate the weight of the ox: he picked out the "middlemost" estimate. One week earlier ("One Vote, One Value," *Nature*, February 28, 1907) he had written:

How can the right conclusion be reached...? That conclusion is clearly *not* the *average* of all the estimates, which would give a voting power to "cranks" in proportion to their crankiness... I wish to point out that the estimate to which least objection can be raised is the *middlemost* estimate, the number of votes that it is too high being exactly balanced by the number of votes that it is too low.

This does not in the least deny Walzer's assertion, but has enormous importance in determining collective decisions.

Michel Balinski
Directeur de recherche de classe
exceptionnelle (emeritus)
CNRS and École Polytechnique
Paris, France

STARS AT THE LIBRARY

To the Editors:

Your readers may be interested to know that the spring season of LIVE from the New York Public Library features conversations with Per Petterson; Hilton Als and Elizabeth Alexander; Diane von Furstenberg and Rhonda Garelick; Suzanne Farrell; Matthew Weiner and A.M. Homes; Werner Herzog; Nathaniel Popper, Gavin Andresen, Fred Wilson, and Andrew Ross Sorkin; and Ian Schrager. For more information, I invite your readers to visit our website: www.nypl.org/live.

Paul Holdengräber
Director, LIVE from the NYPL
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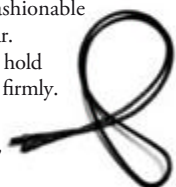
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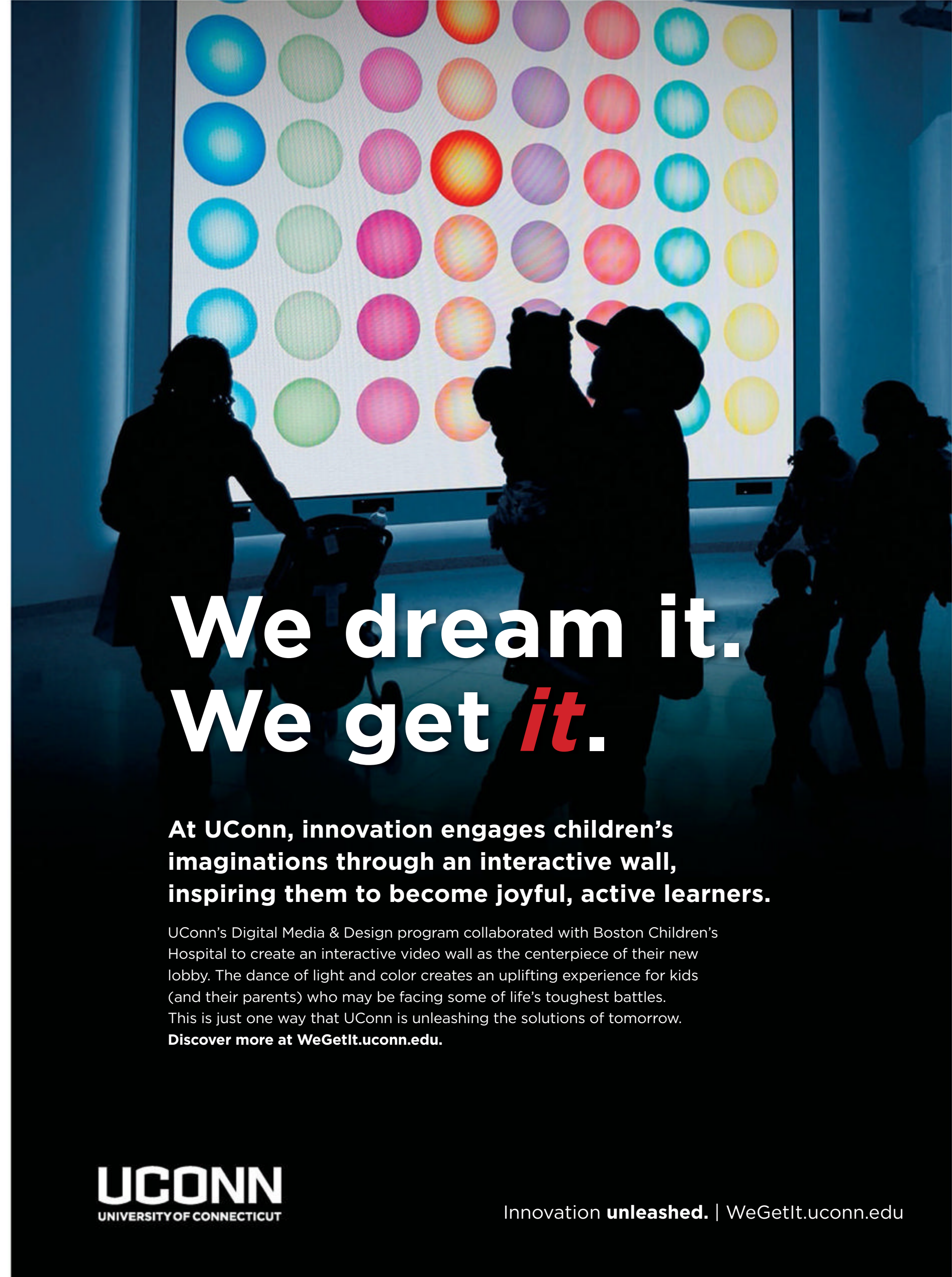
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